

## Five Times People Apologized to Hunter and One Time He Apologized to Someone

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/40703907) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/40703907>.

Rating:	<a href="#">General Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">The Owl House (Cartoon)</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Eda Clawthorne &amp; Hunter</a>   <a href="#">The Golden Guard</a> , <a href="#">Hunter</a>   <a href="#">The Golden Guard &amp; Luz Noceda</a> , <a href="#">Lilith Clawthorne &amp; Hunter</a>   <a href="#">The Golden Guard</a> , <a href="#">Hunter</a>   <a href="#">The Golden Guard &amp; Raine Whispers</a> , <a href="#">Darius Deamonne &amp; Hunter</a>   <a href="#">The Golden Guard</a> , <a href="#">Hooty &amp; Hunter</a>   <a href="#">The Golden Guard (The Owl House)</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Hunter</a>   <a href="#">The Golden Guard (The Owl House)</a> , <a href="#">Eda Clawthorne</a> , <a href="#">Luz Noceda</a> , <a href="#">Flapjack</a>   <a href="#">Cardinal Palisman (The Owl House)</a> , <a href="#">Lilith Clawthorne</a> , <a href="#">King (The Owl House)</a> , <a href="#">Raine Whispers</a> , <a href="#">Darius Deamonne</a> , <a href="#">Hooty (The Owl House)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">5+1 Things</a> , <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Found Family</a> , <a href="#">Emotional Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Apologies</a> , <a href="#">Post-Episode: s02e16 Hollow Mind (The Owl House)</a> , <a href="#">Canon Divergence</a> , <a href="#">Hunter Goes to the Owl House After Hollow Mind</a> , <a href="#">Inspired by Tumblr Discussions on How Even The Good Adults Failed Hunter</a> , <a href="#">hunter needs a hug</a> , <a href="#">He Gets a Hug</a> , <a href="#">and muffins</a> , <a href="#">And a Whole Squad of Parents</a> , <a href="#">Also there is a bit of Hnuter and Hooty bonding</a> , <a href="#">Because Dana's art is inspiring</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-07-31 Completed: 2022-12-27 Chapters: 6/6 Words: 33353

## Five Times People Apologized to Hunter and One Time He Apologized to Someone

by [The River Girl](#)

### Summary

The title says it all. A lot of apologies, emotional talks, and emotional hurt/comfort here. Hunter gets some apologies he deserved. That's the fic.

### Notes

Ok, the most significant difference in this "timeline" is that Labyrinth runners never really happen the way they do in canon. Oh also, Eda and the CATS join together right after HM. The events between Hollow Mind and Clouds on the Horizon happen differently, but the outcome would be the same. But this will primarily focus on Hunter talking to a bunch of people so this does not matter much anyways.



# Eda

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's been three days since Hunter's and Luz's trip into Belos' mind. Three days since he ran out of the Owl House in an utter panic only to be found by Darius, Eber and Raine who, despite Raine's reservations then took him back to the Owl House, where Luz and Eda were looking for him in panic. Three days since he and Luz, barely managing to fight their respective panic attacks, told the adults what they saw. Three days since the awkward conversations between Darius, Raine and Eda resulted in barely formed plans. Three days since they realized they should really speed up their planning because they only had two weeks since the Day of Unity.

Three days since Hunter realized his whole life was a lie.

Three days before he started living with his former enemies.

It was strange, to say the least. To the point that sharing the room with Luz *and* King was the *least* strange part of his current living situation. He could not get used to having so much free time, or three warm meals a day without fearing food would run out before he got to it (at worst, King would devour all bread sticks).

Darius, Raine and Eber would come every day to discuss plans with Eda and, while the adults tried to keep the kids from getting too involved in the drama, neither he nor Luz, not even King were willing to stand to the side. Luz and King simply wanted to help. And he wanted to fix his previous mistakes. He had to. He helped Belos hurt so many people, that he *had to* correct it. And, even though adults made it clear they would rather have kids somewhere safe, even though many arguments were had about this, once the kids were at the table, they were taken seriously. They weren't spoken over or told off. They were treated like equals.

The fourth day of his stay at the Owl house started better than the previous three. Instead of waking up from a nightmare, screaming he woke up at six on his own. Next to him Luz was still profoundly in slumber, King nestled next to her. He didn't understand how other inhabitants of the house slept for hours longer. Even Flapjack was still asleep

He tried turning to his side and falling asleep, but he quickly gave up. Being awake with nothing to do only left him with his thoughts. Not something he wanted. He got up and looked for one of Luz's books. *Travelling through space 101: all about using abominations to teleport*, by Darius Deamonne. Just one of the books about travelling, portals, the legends of journeys to other realms and anything and everything that could help Luz get back to the human realm. He had to give it to her, she was a determined, committed one. She checked every branch of magic, old myths, and tales, as unlikely as the method was to help her, just to be sure she covered everything.

He didn't want to wake her or King up, so he quietly got up, gently took Flapjack with him, and went to the kitchen. He made himself a cup of tea and started reading. But then, another book on one of the Owl Lady's shelves caught his attention. He walked over to the shelf and hesitated for a moment.

The book was about palismen carving.

Wild magic.

Forbidden knowledge.

He stopped there, frozen, even though he was pretty certain that nobody in the Owl House would have any problem with studying wild magic. Would they? Did Eda mention that it's allowed to read her books? His curiosity was stronger, and he took the book. He sat back at the kitchen island and opened it. His hunger for knowledge immediately kicked in and he started reading through the words. He read about choosing the proper type of palistorm wood, the tools, and the proper technique. Someone once used this knowledge to carve Flapjack.

He was so deeply invested in the book he didn't even notice Eda walking in and warming herself a cup of apple blood. It was only when she sat next to him that the smell of the warm drink hit his nostrils and snapped him out.

"Oh...good morning, Owl Lady, Ma'am," he said nervously. He closed the book and straightened his back instinctively, cursing himself for his messy appearance. Why did he have to climb down in his PJs? His hair looked like a bird's nest (appropriate since Flapjack liked to nestle there while sleeping) and he was wearing an old T-shirt with a wolf on and an even older pair of striped sweatpants.

Though, to be fair, Eda looked the way she always did in the morning-her hair even messier than usual, dressed in a long purple skirt and an old sweater along with bunny slippers. It was the bunny slippers that confused him.

"Mh-mm," she raised her cup as a greeting, "mornin'," she said before taking a long sip. "and I told you, it's just Eda. No need for fancy schmancy formalities! Palisman carving 101?" she asked, gesturing at the book.

"Yeah. Um," he realized she never actually mention if he was allowed to just take *her* books without asking, "is...is it ok that I took it? I can put it back immediately if you want me to?"

"Nah, no need," she waved he hand off, barely looking at him, "take whatever book you like, unless it's someone's diary. If I do catch you reading my diary...I can't think of a proper punishment right now, but I will figure it out at some point."

Hunter gulped and nodded, "Ok, I wouldn't read your diary anyways."

"Good!" Eda took another sip of her drink. With every sip, she seemed more awake, "Do you like it?" she pointed with her chin towards the book.

"Yes! It's fascinating! How much different seasons can influence the carving process! And the age of the wood! And the different techniques a master carver will use compared to layman witches who carve their own palismen! I-" he realized Eda wasn't listening to him. He felt his face flush. Of course, she wasn't. He was rambling like an idiot again. Not only was the older witch uninterested in listening to random ramblings but it was *him*. *I thought I recognized that annoying voice...*

"Yeah, palismen are quite an interesting topic," Eda said, though she still sounded bored, "Oh, also, if I sound disinterested, I'm not. I just woke up way too early and I'm functioning on only one cup of apple blood."

"Oh...sorry if I woke you up..."

"Pfft, kid, don't give yourself that much credit. Do you think that you making a cup of tea and reading a book can wake me up after I lived with Hooty for 20 years? Trust me, I can sleep through

*anything* if I want to.”

“I just...don’t want to bore, or annoy you...”

Somewhere in Eda’s still half-asleep brain, she remembered once calling his voice annoying. She winced internally. Considering what the kid probably went through at the Emperor’s Coven, where he was constantly berated, that must’ve not been the most pleasant thing to hear. Eda sucked at apologies, so she decided to try a bit different approach.

“Bore me? Why would you bore me?” she asked.

“Well, you know, back at the castle...everyone said I’m theorising too much. You probably know all of this already, right? I mean, you’re Eda the owl lady, why would you listen to some powerless half-a-with,”

Eda grimaced, “Ok, first of all, new rule for living under this roof. You are not allowed to call yourself half-a-witch,”

“But I-”

“No! Nope!” she pointed a finger at him, “You’re a talented magic user, don’t insult yourself. Secondly, I’m not exactly bursting with magic either at this point,” to prove her point she tried summoning a magic circle which disappeared immediately.

“It’s not the same,” Hunter lamented, “you were born with magic. I...I never had it,”

“Fair enough, it’s not,” she said, “those without magic are not the most...accepted in this realm. And that is wrong. And, sadly, I contributed to that idea,” Hunter snapped his head to her, surprised. Wasn’t she the same woman who took a human as an apprentice? “I used to believe that a witch is only as good as her magic without a staff. And now I guess the karma came to bite me in the butt,” she laughed bitterly, “because I can’t do squat without Owlbert. But I learned I was wrong. Teaching Luz taught me that. You can be a great witch, even if you rely on external magic sources.”

She took another long swig of her drink before continuing, “I was right about one thing though,” she pointed out, “and those idiots at the castle were wrong.”

“Huh?”

“Listen,” she leaned towards him, oddly conspiratorial, “can I tell you a secret?”

He looked at her, then glanced at Flapjack who was still sleeping on the counter, a bit scared, “Um, sure?”

“You know why I was the most powerful witch on the isles? Besides being able to use *all* kinds of magic?”

“Natural talent?”

“Sure, that played a role, but I also worked and learned a lot. I studied every bit of magic I could get my hands on, learned from the wild, the isles themselves, as well as from books. See those notes in that book? I made those, by studying Owlbert and after babysitting Bat Queen’s kids. I was always learning because you must *understand* the magic before you practise it. I was not as methodical as Lily, I often skipped steps, because I found the basics boring, but I learned theory. If you want to be powerful, you must be a nerd, even in secret.

“Well then, I’m sure you know most of the things I know,” he muttered, staring at his hands, “I don’t want to bore you with what you already know.”

“And who said I know everything? Remember Eclipse Lake? When I didn’t listen to you and it blew into my face?” He was surprised at this admission, as Eda didn’t seem like that type to admit she was wrong, “You knew something better than me then. You may have picked up on something I didn’t this time too. You can draw knowledge from anywhere! Some of the most important spells I know I learned from the strangest of sources and in profoundly weird ways. And if you worry about me being annoyed at nerds, well look at the people I hang out with me! One nerd next to the other!”

Hunter was irritated now, not even certain why. It felt like she knew what was bothering him but actively avoided the topic, “Well, I’m certain those other nerds don’t have *an annoying voice!*” he snapped.

Eda scowled and he realized what he had done immediately. He raised his voice at Eda, the adult, the authority figure. His eyes grew wide in shock, “I, I don’t...I...I’m sorry, I don’t know what came over me! I-”

“Don’t!” she raised her hand, “don’t you dare apologize!” she ordered, and he winced, lowering his head. *Your apology is worthless*, he could practically hear her say, *you already messed up-* “You didn’t do anything wrong, kid.”

“What?” he blinked, his mind not computing. Flapjack stirred next to him as if feeling his bafflement.

“Argh, curse me and mushy stuff,” she groaned, pinching the Bridge of her nose, “and before my third cup of apple blood, too,” she sighed, “Look, kid, I’m the one who should apologize.”

“What? Why?”

“Because I was a jerk. I shouldn’t have called your voice annoying that day, simple as that.”

“But...we were on opposite sides!”

“We were, and there was plenty of bad blood between us, I’m not denying nor sugar coating that. Neither of us was exactly friendly nor nice. Though, knowing stuff I know now, I want you to know that I don’t hold things against you, ok? I know you were just doing what you believed was right, and I wasn’t always the kindest witch either. I should’ve apologized immediately but, eh, I suck at it.”

“So you...don’t...think my voice is annoying?”

“No, the only reason why I found it annoying is that you were kind of a thorn in our side, kid. You were annoying, not your voice!”

Hunter slumped and Flapjack gave Eda a side-eye, ready to fly up and defend his person at any moment.

"Shit! Wait!" she cringed, "That came out wrong," she felt Flapjack glaring a hole in her head, "what I mean is, you were a pain to deal with as an opponent."

He shifted awkwardly, averting his gaze, “Sorry,” so he *was* annoying. Flapjack still stared at Eda as if asking *Really? That is supposed to make him feel better?* She had to agree with the bird. She sounded like a prick.

She bumped Hunter in the shoulder lightly and he winced slightly again and looked at her, greeted by her smile. The fact that he barely felt it and that Flapjack was not reacting convinced him that the gesture was friendly, “Nah, it’s water under the bridge now,” Eda said, “Besides, you should be proud,”

“About what? Being *a pain*?”.

“You were a thorn in the side of *the owl lady*!” she winked, “Not everyone gets that title.”

“Doesn’t sound like a good title to me!” he grumbled.

Eda laughed at his confusion, “Sorry, sorry,” she said when he looked a bit offended, “I mean, you got skill kid. And talent. And a brain. To get to be a thorn in my side, you must have all three. Those who don’t, don’t even get noticed,” she smiled and he still stared at her in confusion, “Titan kid, I mean it as a compliment!” She reached to his hair, waiting for a second before she touched him, and this time, he didn’t flinch, though he did frown a bit when she ruffled his hair. Flapjack flew up and chirped happily, *Listen to her. Owl Lady right!*

"You're not irritating," Eda continued, "if that's what you're worried about. Well, no more than my other kids. I told you, I *suck* at apologising and my brain is barely working. I didn't want to call you annoying, you're not. You're passionate about magic and knowledge. And you're in the right place for that."

“Oh...thanks, I guess,” he smiled awkwardly. He was not sure he was worthy of a compliment. But somehow, he knew she meant it. The way she said it, in a somewhat snarky and messy way, seemed so genuine from her. And even Flapjack looked at her fondly.

“You’re welcome. And if you still feel salty about the voice comment, you have every right to be, you know that, right? We were on opposite sides but there was no reason for me to resort to *ad hominem* attacks.”

“Oh...ok...” Hunter said, seeming profoundly confused. He hesitated before admitting. “I may still be...a bit salty.”

“Fair,” Eda nodded.

“Though, as I said, I probably shouldn’t hold it against you after everything. especially since... well, it's not like I wasn't insulting you...”

“I already told you, it’s all in the past. You’re out now and with us, that is what matters.”

“I’m...I’m glad,” Hunter said, “Everything is still confusing but, for what it’s worth, I’m glad to be here.”

Eda smiled appreciatively, “And we’re glad to have you. And you too,” she pointed to Flapjack, “You’re taking good care of your kid, you looked ready to pick my eyes a minute ago at the slightest offence,” Flapjack gave her a look that was somehow at the same times fond and meant *yeah, I would totally pick your eyes out if you hurt Hunter*. Eda reached for the bird and Flapjack allowed her to pet him, before settling on Hunter's shoulder.

As Hunter emptied his cup of tea, Eda finished her apple blood and got up, walking over to the fridge, “Apple blood?” she offered.

“I’m not sure if I should have it,” Hunter frowned.

"It's the kid-friendly kind," she said, "I make sure to have it because Luz likes it, so?"

Hunter shrugged, "I never had it."

"Well, first time for anything also," she looked over at him, studying his skinny form, and took a paper bag with her mother's muffins in it from the fridge, "you need breakfast."

"I'm fine," he said.

"No, you'll eat. Or I'm calling my mother and she *will* make you eat," she put a muffin and a cup of apple blood in front of him.

"Thanks," he took a bite of a muffin and let out a grunt of delight. He finished it in three bites, "this is good!" he looked longingly towards the fridge, but when he noticed Eda noticed him, he averted his gaze. She rolled his eyes, got up and got the entire paper bag filled with muffins and put it in front of him.

"I told you, if you want something around here, you just have to ask, kid," she said. "And if it's food in the fridge, just take it. With one condition,"

"Let me guess," Hunter asked, smirking, "If I take the last carton of apple blood, I have to tell someone to buy more?"

"How'd you guess?" Eda asked.

"Well, you seem to be fond of it," he teased, "almost addicted."

"*Hey!*" she threw a scrunched-up napkin playfully at him, "You have some gall, kid," she snorted, glad to see a bit of Hunter's old personality peak back in. It was strange, she found it irritating that he was a snide little brat when they were on the opposite side. Now she couldn't wait for his personality to return to what it was when they first met, snarky remarks and all. She could appreciate those, "Try it, and then you'll see why I'm fond of

Hunter took a sip, "Ok, this really is tasty," he said.

"See, and if you want to blame anyone for my obsession, blame Raine. They introduced me to it first."

"Really?" Hunter asked and Eda nodded. For a bit they sat in silence, both drinking apple blood while Hunter ate muffins.

At one point, Hunter looked at Eda and realized she looked much more awake than before.

"So," he asked, a bit nervous, "do you want to hear about ancient uses of apple blood?" he still felt like he was boring her, even though she said otherwise. What if she was just trying to be nice? What if she was actually trying to get him to ramble only to laugh? What if...

"Do I?" she said with a grin, "Now you're truly speaking my language, kid! Hit me with the facts! Who knows, maybe some powerful potions with this got lost to time that I can put into my arsenal! Something to blow Terra's face up!"

Terra was one of Hunter's least favourite coven heads too. He thought for a second before he remembered something he read a few months earlier in an ancient potion magic textbook, „Well, there Is this one I heard about, from the early Dreadwardian era..."



They sat there for a while, and Eda genuinely listened to Hunter's ramblings. Whether it was because he picked a good topic for her, or if she genuinely had an interest in *him*, he still wasn't sure. But it didn't matter.

He was being listened to, free to talk about magic, wild or not. With his palisman on his shoulder. It felt nice.

He was glad to be at the Owl House.

## Chapter End Notes

So, I wrote half of this while on the bus, coming back home from vacation. The first half was written while I was still on vacation.

Yes, this chapter is my own way of addressing how annoying the annoying voice gag can be. Hunter has been through enough, leave his voice alone.

I just want Hunter to have good things. Also, the dynamic that would arise between him and Eda, two snarky souls, would be AMAZING!

Thank you for reading, feel free to leave a comment of kudos or to just pass by, I appreciate you all!

# Luz

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*"No, stop," Hunter shouted, as he tried to free himself out of the ground he was stuck in. The earth was pressing on his entire body, crushing his lungs, pinning his limbs and he fought desperately to wiggle free. A few meters away, he saw his friends, Willow, Gus, Viney and Skara fighting a large beast he used to call uncle.*

*"No, stop!" he shouted again, "don't hurt them!"*

*But Belos would not stop, he only lashed out harder, his monstrous body shifting, becoming almost liquid, with long tendrils instead of arms and a beak instead of a mouth, dozens of blue eyeballs covering his body.*

*"No!" He shouted as he saw one of his tendrils almost reach Gus. Somehow staff appeared on his hand, and he used it to teleport. He had to save them!*

*"I can help!" he shouted as he reached his friends, but the next moment Willow used her magic to rip Belos to shreds.*

*"Help?" She turned to him, her eyes oddly emotionless and her voice borderline ridiculing him. "You?"*

*"I-I, I'm sorry I got trapped I really tried to reach you...."*

*"Yeah right, Golden Guard" Gus sounded hostile, and Hunter froze. No, no, no, that was behind him. They knew, his friends knew!*

*"I'm not, Guys I'm not that anymore...." he looked at Willow and Gus, but their faces were as old made of steel, "Skara? Viney?" Both girls turned their heads away from him.*

*"It would be best if you let them alone, Little Prince," Darius suddenly appeared behind him, "after all, a Golden Guard is only a rule follower, who knows if we can trust you."*

*Hunter's face twisted in shock, "You can trust me!"*

*"Why would we?" Willow spat.*

*"Because...I...I, Flapjack, tell them I tried to help, I didn't want for this to happen, please!" he turned to his palisman, but the bird wasn't on his staff. Instead, he realized, he was holding his artificial staff and Flapjack was on Gus' shoulder.*

*"Flapjack..." he begged, tears pooling in his eyes, but the bird turned his head from him, refusing to look him in the eye.*

*"Good Job, Hunter," the beast suddenly rose behind him, and its tendrils enveloped his friends and Darius, starting to suffocate them "or should I say, Golden Guard! You got everyone right where I needed them."*

*"No, no!" he tried to follow as the Beast ran off with his friends, "Stop! I didn't mean for this to happen!"*

*Suddenly, he stumbled into Liz, "Luz', thank Titan! You have to help me! Belos he- he has them and-"*

*"Why would I trust you? You told us to come here, into this trap!" she accused him.*

*"No, I didn't! I-"*

*"You are not a good person! You're just the Golden Guard! You lured us AARRRRGHHH!" a long tendril grabbed her from the back, pulling her into the dark, and he reached for her, unable to stop her.*

*"It's all your fault," overlayed voices of all the people he cared for said, "Golden-"*

"NO!!!" He bolted up, reaching around her, trying to get to his friends.

He blinked, breathing heavily, hot tears streaming down his face. Once, twice, as the shapes in the dark room took form. He was not in the halls beneath the castle, running from Belos. He was on the floor of the messy bedroom. Luz's bedroom.

He was at the Owl House. Flapjack was next to him, flapping in alarm before he settled on Hunter's shoulder, nuzzling against his neck comfortingly. He picked the palisman into his hands, bringing him to his face and pressed their foreheads together. Flapjack chirped, *It will be fine. Just a nightmare. Nor real. It's over. Just a nightmare.*

"Hunter?" He heard Luz's voice next to him. She was up a worried crease between her eyebrows.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up," he mumbled.

"It's fine. Are you ok?"

"Do I seem fine?" He snapped at her, and the corner of her mouth quirked down, "sorry...I...I'll be fine. I can deal with it."

"Hunter, you don't have to *deal with it*, at least not alone," she said, her eyes warm and understanding, "this is why I wanted us to sleep together."

"You wanted to be around my stupid nightmares?"

"They are not stupid, I have them too. And yes, in a way. I wanted to keep my eye on you. If you needed comfort or something. I don't want you to be alone."

"I don't need you to baby me," he scoffed, even though he had to admit, that not being alone was quite nice. And he wanted to keep an eye on her too.

"Not like that. It's just what friends do! Also," she curled up on herself, seeming much more vulnerable, "I don't want to be alone," King snorted in his sleep. Luz chuckled, uncurling slightly so she could pick King up and place him in her lap, "ok, I'm never alone with King around, but... you know. And I really didn't want you to be alone. We're both...not in a good place after what happened."

"Yeah, yeah I know. Sorry I snapped."

"It's ok," she scooted closer to him. "Wanna talk about it?"

"No. You probably heard me screaming anyways if I woke you," he said, staring at some undetermined spot on the wall. "You probably know what it was about."

"You didn't wake me, I just can't sleep," she explained.

For a few moments, they sat in silence, the only sound in the room being Flapjack's sleepy chirps and King's quiet snoring.

At one moment, Luz tapped him on the shoulder slightly, smiling warmly, "Come on, I know a perfect cure for a sleepless night," she got up, holding King under one arm and offering him the other.

He studied her hand suspiciously, "If you feed me sleeping nettles..."

"I'm not stupid!" Luz, rolled her eyes "I meant hot chocolate,"

"What is that?" he took her hand and she pulled him up.

"Oh right," she facepalmed, "I always forget it is not really a thing here! I'm guessing you never had it

"No, I didn't."

"Whoa, now you gotta come," she dragged him down the hall, "come one!"

"What is *hot chocolate*?"

"Only the best drink ever!"

They climbed down to the kitchen, and he sat at the kitchen island while Luz went to the stove to prepare the allegedly best drink ever. He saw her pouring milk into a pot and taking a jar of some type of brown powder.

"It's not true, by the way," she suddenly said, after minutes of silence.

"What isn't true?"

"You're not just the golden guard."

"Uh-huh, right," he scoffed, as he stared at his hands. Scarred and calloused, he followed the white and reddish lines on the skin with his finger. He wished he remembered to take his gloves with him, "and we're not sitting in the Owl Lady's kitchen! I know it's the truth, no need to sugarcoat it to spare my feelings. You said so much yourself."

"I know," Luz turned to him, leaning on the counter, "and I'm sorry for it, I'm sorry I called you a bad person. I'm sorry I said you're just a golden guard."

"It's ok. I know why you said it. I was just...following orders blindly. I hurt you," he looked at King, "And your family. I almost hurt those palismen. I hurt other palismen, and I knew it. But I still did it," he let his hands fall into his lap limply, "Juts a golden guard."

Flapjack chirped something, picking at his hair, but Hunter gave no reaction.

"I think he disagrees," Luz said. She sat opposite to him, and gently took his hand. He tensed but didn't pull away, "and so do I. If you were *just* the golden guard, you wouldn't have helped me that day, or kept him, or helped Willow a while back."

"Ugh, you heard..." Hunter turned his face away, angry at himself.

“Dude, of course, I heard! Willow and Gus are my best friends! We tell each other stuff.”

“So, you know the whole story right? How I tricked your friends! And now that we know what the sigils do you know I almost made your friends get marked with something that means their certain Death! Yet another thing I messed up...how can you say I'm *not* a bad person!” Angry tears threatened to spill from his eyes.

King stirred in his sleep and Hunter quieted down. He didn't have to add *woke up an 8-year-old* to his list of misdeeds.

“Because you realized it was wrong and you fixed it. A golden guard wouldn't do that. But Hunter did,” she smiled, squeezing his hand lightly, “And trust me, everyone messes up. I, as a certified mess-upper, can assure you, it's ok.”

“Oh, I know you're a mess-upper, you and our *plans*,” he teased, making air quotes.

“Oh, come on! I was trying to be nice, and this is how you repay me, jerk!” she stuck her tongue at him, as she got up to check on the milk on the stove.

“Ok, ok fine, I can be nice too! For someone who doesn't think things through, like at all! Like, it's impressive how impulsive you are...”

“Wow, this feels *soo* nice...”

“Shut up! I'm getting to it! I wanted to say you're a quick thinker,” he offered a genuine smile, “Which...you kinda have to be, considering how many messes you get yourself in!”

“Oh come on! That is a backhanded compliment at best,” she swatted him with the dishcloth, both laughing, “Though...kinda true. I'm...I'm working on it.” She smiled awkwardly. “But really, thanks for letting us go that day. I hope you didn't get into too much trouble for defying orders. I'm...I should've realized how bad it was, sorry.”

“Stop apologizing,” Hunter said, “what he did...that is not on you. And...well, it went...ok, all things considered. I mean, I got into trouble but...I wasn't hurt or anything. I got Flapjack out of the ordeal, and honestly, that means the most,” the palisman flew to his shoulder and nuzzled against his neck and he scratched Flapjack's neck.

“Awww, you two are *so* cute,” Luz cooed.

“Mphhh...” Hunter blushed.

“I'm not teasing now, I'm serious!”

"I know," he sighed. Maybe he didn't mind being cute around Flapjack *that* much, "and I do mean..." he sighed. Compliments didn't come easy to him. "I did mean it when I said you're smart, ok? No backhanded compliments. You *do* figure things out quickly, whether it's a mess of your making or someone else's fault."

"Yeah, but I also fell for Phillip's lies and..." she sniffed, "if I didn't none of this would have happened. You wouldn't have a horrible non-uncle who hurt you and...and...I'm sorry..."

"I wouldn't even exist," Hunter sighed, not sure what to make of that fact. He shook the thoughts of existential dread away, focusing on his upset friend instead, “We don't know what would've happened, ok? Look, if you claim I shouldn't blame myself for following him, you shouldn't blame yourself either. Especially since you met Phillip when he still wasn't...well, obviously evil. You

had no idea, and I don't think anyone would in your situation. So, the fact that he used your kindness to hurt people later is *not* your fault. You shouldn't apologize for that."

"Thanks," she sniffed, wiping off tears, "I still feel like I should fix stuff."

"Me too," Hunter said. "Maybe we can fix it together!"

"Yeah! Of course we will! The bad girl coven!" Luz grinned confidently, as she mixed the brown powder into the warm milk, "Hope you don't mind milk substitutes. One thing that this realm and the human realm have in common is lactose in milk. And I'm intolerant."

She poured the brown, rich-smelling liquid into the mugs and added what looked like tiny pillows on top. She brought the mug to her lips, "Ooh, hot!" she took a few ice glyphs from her pocket and used them to create tiny ice cubes.

"Um...apology accepted, by the way. Not that you have much to apologize for anyways..." he said, as she handed him the mug, "And... you have good intuition with magic," he pointed to the tiny cubes of ice, offering another compliment, for good measure.

"Thanks, so do you."

"I don't have magic..." he frowned.

"Neither do I. But if I can have a good intuition for magic without magic, so can you," she poked him in the chest and Flapjack chirped with her, *You are right. She is right! Both have good intuition! Both good with magic.*

He looked at her, finding only a genuine smile, "Thanks, and Flapjack says you're good with magic too!"

"Aww, thank you little rascal!" she smiled at the palisman, then turned back to Hunter, "I can also teach you how to use glyphs better," she offered, "how to use the same symbol to do this," she made another tiny ice cube, "or this," she made a bigger cube, "or even this!" she tapped the third glyph, creating an ice Flapjack.

The bird started to excitedly flap around it, happily looking between Hunter and Luz. For a bit they just sat, observing the palisman, and then Hunter finally sipped on the chocolate.

"Oh, titan this is...this *is* good!"

"Do you doubt my taste?" Luz asked with a feigned offence.

"Eh..." he made a so-so gesture with his hand.

"Don't answer that!" Luz ordered, pointing her spoon at him.

He took it as a challenge, "I totally do!" he struck his tongue at her.

"Hunter!"

"Yesterday I saw you dunk potato chips and pickled broil spouts into apple blood jam! How should I *not* doubt your taste!"

"That is a delicious combination!"

“No, no it’s not,” Hunter argued, “this, however, this is good! What is it?”

“I told you, hot chocolate! It’s a human realm drink. I found a bag of hot chocolate powder in Eda’s kitchen. She got them somehow from the human realm a while back, not sure how...

“What’s it like there?” he asked without thinking. Luz looked at him as if stricken, audibly gasping.

“The human...”

“Sorry, sorry, I wasn’t thinking...” Hunter wanted to slap himself. He knew Eda used the last bit of titan blood to get them out of the emperor’s mind. That he was the reason Luz didn’t have the key anymore. The reason she couldn’t get to the human realm. To bring it up was beyond insensitive.

“No, it’s fine. Ask what you want just...nothing too personal, I’m not in the mood. If I start talking about it...I might just fall apart,” she dolefully stirred her hot chocolate. Flapjack notices her suddenly sullen mood. He looked at Hunter, and then at Luz. Hunter nodded, giving the bird permission to comfort his friend instead of him. She needed it more at the moment.

Flapjack flew into Luz’s lap and she scratched his head, smiling slightly.

“Are you sure it’s ok?” Hunter asked her and she nodded.

“As I said, nothing too personal. But you can ask about the world.”

Hunter nodded, “Ok. Just...unc-Bel-*he* told me about it. And...I’m not sure what is true anymore...”

Liz looked up at him, “What did he say?”

“That trees are green, and that rain doesn’t boil, for starters.”

“Both are true. Um, wait!” she reached for her phone, “Look, these are pictures from the human realm,” he looked at the photos she showed him. Green parks with colourful flowers. Babbling brooks and waterfalls. The stormy skies. People swimming in the ocean. Tall buildings that would put even the castle to shame.

“It...some of the things are the same as he described but others...”

“Changed. Well, Belos is...if he lived here for hundreds of years, he remembers different Earth. Imagine if nothing changed here since the Deadwardian era.”

“That would be weird,” Hunter said, imagining what it would be like if they still wore ruffles and long gowns. “Is it beautiful? The human realm? He said it is, but he lies about everything else. And the pictures are pretty but, I don’t know.”

Luz was pensive for a second, “Some things are. The nature. The architecture can be really pretty. It’s less dangerous in some ways than here. The weather is nicer and there are no beasts running around, the sea is not boiling...but bad people exist, and bad things still happen. Some things are worse than her. Some customs and beliefs. And sometimes you don’t fit in and that can be bad and-” her voice broke into a sob, and she balled her hands into fists. “Sorry...I can’t...not now...”

Hunter wanted to comfort her but was unsure how to do it. Should he just talk? Offer a hug? Try to cheer her up with a bad joke? In the end, he simply put a hand on her shoulder awkwardly, “That’s ok. Sorry if I hit a sore spot.”

She chuckled as she put her hand on his, squeezing it back, "Huh, we do apologize a lot," Luz noted, "It's ok, though. I miss some things from the human realm and others I don't."

"Belos...Phillip...he...do those witch Hunters still exist?" he asked with concern.

"No. Not Like that. But there are still people who see anything different s bad. People who might not do what Phillip did, but would agree with him. I don't miss that."

"Right. We don't have to talk about the human realm if you don't want to."

Luz shrugged "I can still tell you about hot chocolate. It's a neutral enough topic."

"Yeah? Is it like a human potion?"

"Well, in a way...so, there are these trees called cocoa trees- They give cocoa seeds. And then those seeds are roasted and crushed into powder and that's how you get the cocoa. Then that is mixed with sugar and butter and a whole bunch of things and then you get chocolate powder," she shifted awkwardly, "Sorry, that is not the most detailed description of the process. But it's been a while since I read up on it."

"It's ok. But how does it make you feel better?"

"Not sure," she yawned, "I mean it tastes good and it's the common comfort drink back on Earth. I think that there is this chemical that makes you feel better in it. Life coffee, bit different."

"Cool," he said, yawning. Both of their eyes were closing at that point and, within minutes, two friends were sprawled over the counter. Luz pulled King closer to her and Flapjack nestled into Hunter's hair. Hunter had his arm thrown protectively over Luz's back.

When Eda went to grab a 3 A.M. snack, she found the four peacefully sleeping. She smiled, glad to see them getting some rest. She hoped Hunter would manage to sleep post 6. The kid needed it.

She turned into her harpy form and carried Luz and King back to their room.

"Hunter?" Luz asked groggily when she laid her on her bed.

"I'll get him now kid," she caressed her hair and pressed a kiss to King's horn.

Within seconds Eda came back with Hunter and laid him next to Luz, ruffling his hair. Luz reached for his hand and, surprisingly, even in his sleep he took it. Luz pulled King closer and Flapjack landed next to Hunter. The boy put his other hand over his palisman.

Eda closed the door behind her, leaving her two, no, *three*, kids to sleep peacefully.

## Chapter End Notes

I absolutely adore the idea of Luz's adnd Hunter's friendship.

Also, I fully subscribe to both "Hunter's hands are scarred," and "Hunter has weird sensory issues with his hands," so the fact that he took her hand is huge.

Thank you for reading, comments are appreciated!!





# Lilith

## Chapter Summary

When Lilith arrives at the Owl House things end up being tense between her and Hunter.

And then a certain bug demon decided to take things into his own coils.

## Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait, this chapter was surprisingly hard to write and I'm also working on two other long fics and looking for a job at the same time.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As strange as Luz, Eda, King and especially Hooty were, the one household member Hunter had the most trouble getting used to was Lilith Clawthorne. She arrived the morning after his and Luz's trip to the emperor's mind to help with plans and preparation for the fight with the Coven that was certainly coming.

Hunter always remembered her as incredibly poised and proper, or at least she tried to pass herself as such. He knew how easy it was to get under her skin, to get her to cry indignantly as he pointed out how he got some important task or another over her. But, she still worked hard to preserve the façade of the put-together, cold, coven head. Her face a mask of indifference, in a long, perfectly pressed black dress and without a hair out of place.

To say that seeing her in the living room was shocking was an understatement. He barely recognized her at first. Her hair was curlier now, streaked with grey strands. She wore oversized, round glasses and more colours than he'd ever seen on her. But the weirdest thing was seeing her warmly, almost sickeningly so, greet Hooty, before her expression turned dark and she asked the bird tube for Eda.

"Lilith?" Hunter stared at her in confusion.

She turned to him, her eyes wide, "Oh, Hunter..." she trailed off, her disposition changing as she clearly didn't expect him to be the first person she bumped into when she came to the Owl House.

To make matters worse, Hunter knew he looked ridiculous. He was wearing Luz's pants, the ones she wore when they met in Latissa, that were too short on him, revealing his cardinal socks and a T-shirt with a wolf illustration on it that Eda dug out for him from her closet. Over that, he wore an old, fluffy, mint green house robe he found because the morning was cold. And, the worst was, he had bunny slippers because, for some titan-forsaken reason, Eda seemed to have a collection of those.

The two former leaders of the Emperor's Coven stood awkwardly in the living room. Hunter didn't know how to act. What do you say to a woman you had a strange rivalry with in the past? *Hey, nice to see you out of what turned out to be an evil cult that we both used to be a part of. Worse,*

*one that we used to co-lead. You look nice.*

“And Hooty’s here too!” the bird tube said, breaking the silence. At any other moment, Hunter would find the bird tube annoying, but at that point, he was glad for the distraction.

“Oh, hey Lilith,” Eda finally walked into the room, still in her pyjamas and her bunny slippers, the *30 and flirty* mug in hand, “Come on, let’s go to the kitchen. You too Blondie, we have a lot to talk about.”

He reluctantly followed the Owl Lady and Lilith into the kitchen, quickly joined by Luz, who noticed his discomfort, “You ok?” she asked.

At first, he wanted to dismiss her concern, to just nod, say *I’m fine* and move on. But, after their misadventure in the emperor’s mind, he felt oddly comfortable around her, “It’s....complicated,” he said in the end.

“Oh, right. You and Lilith didn’t like each other much, did you?”

“What did she say about me?” Hunter asked and the way Luz pressed her lips together, awkwardly shifting on her feet told him enough, “Nothing nice, huh?”

“Well...no. But I know she was wrong now,” Luz raised her hands defensively.

He didn’t say a word, just scowled slightly at the kitchen door.

“Hey, if you don’t want to be here, you don’t have to. I get it. I mean, the first time Lilith moved in here it was only a day after she nearly,” she drew a thumb over her throat, making a *sqguekh* sound. “So, I get if it’s strange for you to be around her.”

Hunter stared at the girl in mild shock. He almost forgot that the beef between her and Lilith went so far. Luz noticed him staring and shrugged, “I mean, I don’t think she *really* wanted to hurt me, she was just threatening Eda but... it was awkward. She changed, but if you don’t want to be around her still, it’s fine. I’ll tell them you... I don’t know, felt tired. I can tell what we saw in his mind,” she offered.

He knew it was a genuine offer. Luz had a tendency to mess with people, though not when it was serious like this. But he also noticed the way she looked at the kitchen door, the way she hugged herself. How much she *didn’t* want to be by herself while speaking of the horrors they witnessed. For a moment, he wanted to offer to simply let Flapjack go with her as moral support and to retreat back into her room but decided against it.

She stuck by him through the depths of Belos’ mind, and they were still enemies at that point.

He could at least go with her now that they were friends.

“No, it’s fine,” he sighed, “Four heads are smarter than three. I’m not letting you talk about it all alone.”

“Thanks. Come on now,” she dragged him towards the kitchen.

The talk was not as uncomfortable as he thought it would be, especially with Flapjack being there to comfort him and Owlbert doing the same for Luz. Though Lilith seemed to actively avoid talking to him, mostly speaking to Luz instead.

The following days, however, things were different. Hunter noticed that every time he would enter

any room Lilith was already occupying, she would quickly leave the room. Sometimes, she would find an excuse, though her reasons for leaving became increasingly less believable, while other times she'd just get up and leave, without a single word.

Well, some things didn't change since his coven days, apparently.

.....

Five days into his stay at the Owl House and four days of the two avoiding each other, he sat on the floor of Luz's room, reading one of Eda's books on wild magic. Her library was impressive, if scattered around the entire house.

It was 6:30 in the morning and he was the only one awake. Luz, Flapjack, and King were still sleeping. He finally slept through the whole night, no need for Luz's sugary recipes or late-night talks. But, once he woke up, he couldn't sleep and didn't want to wake them up either, so he sat, quietly taking in all the knowledge that was forbidden until recently.

Suddenly, Hooty peeked through the window.

"Hey ex-GG!" the bird tube invaded his personal space.

"Shhhh!" he shushed the demon, pushing him away, "Get out of my face! Also, don't call me that!"

Hooty ignored him, avoiding his hand and looking into his book, "What are you reading?"

"A book on palisman spells," Hunter grunted, "Can you leave me alone now?"

"No, I came with a question. Can you come to the basement?"

Hunter eyed the house demon suspiciously, "Why?"

"We need you for something!" the bird tube said and retreated down towards the front door.

"Wait! Bird Tube!" Hunter stuck his head through the window, "Hooty! Why do I need to come... aaand, he's gone, great! If it's Eda being cryptic again, I'm going to flip!" He closed the book, careful not to damage the spine.

He marked it with one of Luz's bookmarks. He was, in fact, the only one using Luz's bookmarks because, even though she owned more bookmarks than any person reasonably needed, she used anything *but* bookmarks to mark her books. She was ridiculous.

"Hey, Luz," he said to his sleeping friend.

"Mmm?"

"I'm going downstairs to do whatever they need me to do. Don't freak out when you wake up and I'm gone, ok?"

"Mh-mmm," she said, wrapping herself even tighter into the blanket.

"You didn't get a word of it, did you?" he asked and the only answer he got was a soft snore and a huff from King. Even Flapjack didn't react. He sighed, took a piece of paper from one of the piles of books and wrote Luz a note.

*Hooty said they need me down in the basement. Went to check what is going on. Don't freak out.*

He didn't bother changing out of his pyjamas as he left the room and went downstairs.

"Eda?" he called as he neared the basement door, "I'm here, what do you need me for?" there was no answer, but he descended into the dark room regardless. He knew there was no danger, but something still felt off, and he wished he took Flapjack with him. Or at least his scroll, he could use a flashlight. The room was not entirely enveloped in darkness, there was only a thin ray of light coming through the basement window and he saw a figure standing in the basement.

The figure was slightly shorter than Eda and had significantly curlier hair.

"Lilith!?" he asked, confused. Did she and Hooty need him? It made sense, she was the only one to get up early aside from him.

"Hunter!" she turned. Just like him, she was still in her night clothes, a strange T-shirt with a battery on it, a long black skirt, and a light grey, fluffy cardigan. She also wore bunny slippers. For the first time in a few days, she didn't seem displeased to see him, "Do you know what this is about?"

"What? I thought you knew! Hooty came to my window and said *come to the basement, we need you!* I thought Eda could use a hand with something but now..."

"Oh, pfft!" Lilith swatted her hand dismissively, "Eda? Awake at this hour? Oh, no, unless something is on fire or somebody is dying, my sister is still snoring away!"

"So, wait? If you're here, confused and for no reason other than, I assume, Hooty telling you that you are needed here and I'm here also just because Hooty told me I'm needed here... why exactly are we here? And why the two of us specifically? We don't really...get along..."

"I don't know-" she gasped, and snapped her head towards the basement door, "No! He's pulling a Hooty scheme on us!" she ran up the stairs and towards the door, but, before she could reach them, the basement door shut. She grabbed the doorknob and tried to open it, but to no avail. The door wasn't budging.

"What? Hooty scheme? What are you talking about?"

"It's what he does when there is a problem in the house," Lilith frantically ran to the other side of the room, as if she expected to find the exit there, "Oh come on! He closed the love tunnel exit too?"

"Love tunnel...you're not making any sense!"

Lilith ignored him, passing by him, pulling her hair in frustration. She glared at the ceiling, her eyes burning, "Hootsifer! Don't you dare pull this-"

"You leave me no choice Lulu and ex-GG!" Hooty's incorporeal voice said. It was as if he was speaking from the walls themselves.

"Hootsifer, you may be my best friend but if you don't let us out, so help me titan..." Lilith threatened, clenching her fists.

"I told you to stop calling me ex-GG!"

"It's just a nickname, jeez!" Hooty's voice said. "Listen, you two are truly leaving me no choice. You won't get along? Well, now you have to!"

“What, did you leave us in some kind of escape room that we can only escape by working together? You get we don’t have to *get along* to work together to figure out a problem? We worked together before; we can put personal feelings aside to achieve a goal!” Hunter said smugly.

“Yes! I for one am master of escape rooms!” Lilith bragged, “Now, if you please, Hootsifer, give us the first clue!”

“Oh, but you see, that is not what I’m doing here,” Hooty said, and Hunter suddenly felt like the bird tube was the one being smug. He really wished he had his staff at that point. Firstly, to teleport out of Eda’s stupid basement. And secondly, so he could smack Hooty across the face with it.

“Then what are you doing?” Lilith asked nervously.

“Well, since you are my best friend Lulu and ex-GG...”

“STOP CALLING ME THAT!”

“...is my new friend, it is my sacred duty to help you solve your issues!”

“What issues,” Lilith squeaked awkwardly, an overly wide smile on her face. She nervously fixed her glasses, and stood upright, playing with her hair. She looked like a mess, “We don’t have issues! *I* don’t have issues!”

“Oh, but I’ve seen you two the last few days. See, you said you can put feelings aside and work well together. But I don’t think that is true, because you’re hardly ever in the same room. So, I want you to do the opposite of putting your feelings aside...”

“Hootsifer...” Lilith warned.

“Bird tube...” Hunter threatened.

“...I want you to *talk things out!*”

“WHAT?” Lilith blanched.

“Are you out of your mind?” Hunter clenched his fists, feeling like he could strangle the demon.

“Hootsifer this is not the way!”

“You leave me no choice, Lulu. I gave you time. But now, time is out. As your BFF, I have to help you face your problems.”

Hunter scowled at the ceiling, “Well, I’m not your *BFF!* You don’t *have* to help me with anything! Let. Me. Out!” he ran up the basement stairs and started banging at kicking at the door.

“Nope! You have to do the same, ex-“

“If you finish that sentence, I’ll dig myself out of here with my bare hands to punch you in the face, got it?” Hunter threatened.

“Hooty, please,” he heard Lilith and even he recognized that her suddenly referring to the bird tube by name and not the ridiculous nickname she gave him, was a sign of her getting really pissed off, “Let us out, Eda will wake up, or Luz and they will be worried...”

“Oh, no, that won’t happen! Eda stayed up hours after you went to sleep, going through some old

photos of hers while Luz found a two hundred k hurt/comfort Azura/Hecate fanfic and stayed up reading it. They won't be up for *hours!*"

Hunter blinked. The bird tube had a freaking strategy.

Even Lilith seemed surprised. She turned to him, "He is a criminal mastermind."

"Oh, you didn't know that about your *BFF?*" Hunter asked snidely, "Come here, help me break the door open!"

"Trust me, it's no use," Lilith sighed, even as she came to his side and they started pushing at pulling at the door together, "If Hooty wants that door closed, they will stay closed."

"How about glyph magic?" Hunter asked.

"I'm not attacking my best friend with glyphs!"

"Your best friend locked us in the basement!"

"And I can take a lot of hits! It would take you hours to bring me down! Hours, I tell you!" Hooty screeched. Hunter was heavily tempted to take one of the many pieces of paper lying around the basement and throw a fireball at the door, but he decided against it.

"Fine. Maybe that would be...unnecessarily cruel..." and he didn't want to face the Owl Lady if he damaged her property, "we'll just... wait him out."

"Oh, he can be stubborn," Lilith said defeatedly.

"Well, he must let us out to eat. Or use the toilet," Hunter said.

"There is a small bathroom in the basement. Also," she pointed to a corner of the room and on the shelf, there were Hex Mix bags and cartons of apple blood and, ugh, Ghoul Aid. Lilith eyed the ceiling as if she wanted to say, *How dare you be prepared, Hooty!*

"Seriously?" Hunter slumped. "Well then, we just have to wait until Eda or Luz wake up. He might listen to them."

"I'll just tell them you went to the market!" Hooty claimed.

"Oh really? Like they would buy that the two of us, together, would go to the market! Especially while on the run from the emperor!" Hunter snarked at the demon.

"Hootsifer, I think Hunter found a hole in your plan," Lilith said. Hunter felt weird. It almost sounded like she was giving him a compliment.

"It will be a long while until that happens...a loooonnnnggg whileee..."

"Ugh!" Hunter kicked one of the crates filled with human junk, "Fine! We can play the waiting game!" he stomped over to the other side of the basement. He found a piece of paper, drew a light glyph on it and tapped it, using the warm light to look for a book, a chess board, a crossword magazine, anything to keep his mind occupied. After about three minutes of rummaging through human junk, he found a few books. One had the face of some human on it and the title in a language he didn't recognize. The other wasn't actually a book but a human magazine that suggested *ten perfect tips for smooth legs and other summery beauty advice*. The third was a biography of some human celebrity.

Deciding to take what he could get, he sighed, pulled an old cushion and started reading the third book. He heard Lilith on the other side of the room rummaging through something. He glanced at her, realizing she used a plant glyph to create flowers and was now making an arrangement in an old, cracked vase she found.

If his judgment was right, about half an hour passed before he heard Lilith let out a heavy sigh and started pacing up and down the room. She dragged the sole of her slipper on the floor and the sound was distracting.

“Can you please be quiet?” he asked sourly after losing the line for the third time, “I’m trying to read!”

“And I’m trying to think of a way out of here!”

Hunter snorted, “And what, the flowers will tell you?”

Lilith huffed, “It helps me refocus my thoughts!”

“Mh-mm,” Hunter nodded, “So, any brilliant ideas?”

He knew she was staring at him, red in the face with frustration and part of him enjoyed it, “Well,” she said, “I...don’t. HOOTSIFER! LET US OUT THIS INSTANT!” she yelled, and she sounded so indignant, Hunter was surprised she was not stomping her foot like a toddler.

“Wow...so effective,” Hunter said sarcastically though, secretly, he hoped it would work. The book he was reading was boring as far. Why would someone wax on about some random singer's cousins was beyond him.

“And do you have any better plans?” she asked.

“I don’t know? Wait until someone wakes up? Luz, King, Eda, Flapjack, your palisman, Eda’s palisman, someone is bound to notice we’re gone.”

“It’s barely two minutes past seven,” she said, “we’ll be here for hours!”

*It’s been less than 30 minutes?* Hunter thought, horrified at the slow progress of time.

Lilith leaned against the door melodramatically, “Oh, this is a disaster! Being stuck here-”

“Right, it must be *so* horrible for you to be stuck here since you hate me,” he scoffed.

She turned around with a strange expression, like a mix of frustration, confusion and something else he couldn’t place, “What?”

“What what? It’s true! You can’t stand being in the same room with me,” he continued, “Do you think I’m stupid and haven’t noticed? Every time I enter the room you’re in, you find a reason to leave, sometimes even if others are there. And every time you enter the room *I’m* in, you say something like *oh-oh, wrong room* and then you chuckle like an idiot and leave!” he wasn’t certain where his words were coming from, or even why her reactions were bothering him so much. She wasn’t someone like Eda, who he didn’t want to disappoint because she gave him a roof over his head. Or even like Luz, who was nice and kind even if they weren’t always friends and who, he begrudgingly had to admit, he liked.

She was just...Lilith.



She still stared at him, expression unreadable. Then she sighed and it was as if someone cut the strings of a puppet. Her posture relaxed and she flopped to the ground, sitting on a cushion not far from him. She rested her chin on top of her knees, sitting like that for a few moments. Then, she turned to him with a sad smile and spoke, "Why did I ever think you were an insolent brat?"

The whole sitting-down on the ground and especially the question was the last thing he expected. For Lilith to scream at him about how much of an insolent brat he was? Perhaps. For her to get all huffy and indignant about it? Definitely a possibility. Claiming she didn't hate him and that he was an idiot who perceived things wrongly? Sure thing. Even ignoring him completely while continuing her tirade at the bird tube would make sense.

But her curling up and blabbering something about him being or not being a brat? That made no sense.

"Because...I could be rather flippant at times?" he answered, entirely unsure how to react to her behaviour.

"Well, that is to be expected from a teenager," she sighed. "Especially one put into the position you were put in."

"And you hated me for it," he said again.

"I didn't-" she cut herself off as if looking for the right words, "I didn't like you, but it was...of for the love of the titan, I was *jealous*!"

"What?" he stared at her, completely in shock.

"Yes, I know, right? Very mature of me, a grown woman, jealous of a fifteen-year-old boy!"

"Sixteen," he corrected her.

"You were fifteen when you took the position, weren't you?" she asked.

"Why would you, a coven leader, be jealous?"

"Because...you were walking around the castle, ordering people around and...it doesn't matter anyway," she said, "you were *good* at what you were doing. And I took that as a personal offence."

"You were at a higher position than me!" he snapped.

"I know, I know, I'm not trying to justify it I just..." she dragged her hands through her hair, "I sacrificed so much to get to the position I was in. Too much. But I believed it was all worth it. And then you came, allegedly the emperor's nephew immediately put into the high position. The worst is, as I said, you were *good* at your job. And I refused to see it, instead claiming you were there just because of nepotism, seeing the brash teenager instead of who you really are. An actually capable Golden Guard."

"You know, if you said the same thing only a few days ago, I would've taken it as a compliment. Now, I'm not so sure."

"It's a compliment to your skill, regardless of who you worked for. And...I'm sorry," she said and he stared at her surprised. "I'm sorry I was so wrapped up in my own things that I failed to notice how you were treated. How much you were hurt. And I'm sorry if I made your stay at the castle any more uncomfortable."

“Well, honestly...you didn’t always make it easy,” he said remembering her harsh remarks and stand-offish attitude, “But on the other,” he smirked, “making fun of you was worth it.”

“Hey now I-” she raised her finger, huffing and then blinked twice, blushing slightly in embarrassment, “I’m doing it again am I not?”

“Yup!” he popped the p. “Lilith, the huffy.-face!”

She chuckled, “Ok, ok, I deserve that.”

He thought for a second, “Wait...is that why you avoided me for the last five days? Because you suck at facing your past and apologizing?”

She groaned, “Yes. I...when Eda called me, it’s not that I didn’t realize she mentioned you I just completely focused on hr and Luz and, well, when I saw you in the house, it was a shock. Then, it hit me. I wasn’t treating you properly before You may not have been my direct responsibility, but you were a child. One that needed support. But instead of allowing myself to see it, I made you out to be this arrogant brat, deserving of my scorn. I took my own resentment and failings out on you, failing you in the process,” she sighed, “I didn’t know how to address that, any of it. And instead of dealing with it, I avoided you. Which I shouldn’t have. I didn’t want to make your stay here feel uncomfortable. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah...I thought,” he looked away, still unsure why the idea bothered him so much, “I thought you wanted nothing to do with me.”

“No, that is not the case,” Lilith said, “But I do understand if *you* want nothing to do with *me*. And I won’t blame you for it. That would be understandable after everything.”

He remembered that Luz said the same thing to him the first time Lilith appeared at the Owl house since he was here. And he realized that, despite everything in the past, he didn’t mind the new version of Lilith. He couldn’t just glance over everything, titan, he didn’t even know what *everything* was, as he was just starting to process how messed up he was, but he didn’t want to dwell on it either, “That is...not the case either. I’m fine with...giving you a chance.” he ended up saying.

“Thank you,” she smiled.

For a few moments, they just sat there, under the warm light of the glyph magic orbs. Hunter with his legs crossed, Lilith with her chin rested on top of her knees, staring at the door pensively. He looked at her, with her messy hair, unremarkable sleeping clothes and her hands stained with plants. Oddly, despite their predicament, she somehow seemed far more content than he has ever seen her in the coven.

“How do you get over it?” he suddenly asked.

“Get over what?”

“I...back in the coven, I did some,” he swallowed thickly, it was still hard to say even if he was slowly accepting it was true, “Bad stuff. Like a lot of really bad stuff. I hurt people, palismen, I know you did too. You said I was a good Golden Guard, I don’t think that is a good thing anymore.”

“As I said, it’s still a testament to your skill. But you’re here now, aren’t you.”

“Yeah, right. But I believed it at first. I helped...him. I helped him. And he isn’t even my uncle...”

he is...just Belos.”

“At least you believed you were doing someone good,” Lilith said. “You were a child raised by that...that...I don’t have the right words for him and I don’t even know if I have the right to insult him after working under him for so many years. “

“Weren’t you also there because you were looking for a cure for Eda?”

“Ah, yes. I worked for a tyrant for decades to find a cure for my sister who I cursed in the first place,” she chuckled bitterly.

“When you put it that way...it sounds...bad.”

“Yes, it does. And I have to live with it. You asked me how you get over it? The guilt? Well, I tell you when I find out,” she said melancholically, “But for what is worth, I believe you are nowhere near to blame as much as I am. At least your heart was always in the right place. Half of the things I did was to satisfy my own ambition and ego.”

“You left in the end.

“Yes. So did you”

“It was hard. When Luz and I were in there she...she knew. She knew he was bad, she knew what I, what we were doing was bad news and I...I didn’t...” he shut his eyes, clenching the fabric of his T-shirt. How was he ever so stupid to ignore what now seemed obvious?

“You didn’t listen. You refused to listen. You told yourself that what you believe must be right, that *he* must be good, doing things for the righteous cause, that he will do good by you. And now that you’re on the other side, you’re wondering how you could have ever been that naïve.”

He lifted his head and looked at Lilith, who stared at some unspecified spot, her face void of emotions, “You...know?”

She smiled sadly, “You had Luz to scream the truth at you and you realized it after knowing her for what, a few weeks? I had my sister who screamed it at me for 30 years and I refused to listen.”

“He almost killed me and someone I care for before I would listen.”

“Well, in that we are the same,” Lilith said. “At least you haven’t hurt said someone irreparably in the process.”

He stared at her, dumbfounded, for a few moments and then suddenly chuckled.

“What?”

“Nothing, I’m just imagining how strange this is. Two former coven heads, dressed in their mismatched PJs, sitting in one of their sister’s, the most wanted criminal, basement, talking about how messed up they are about being former coven heads.”

Lilith stared at him for a moment and then started to laugh. She looked ridiculous, the whole situation was ridiculous so, moments later, Hunter started to laugh as well. The two were practically rolling with laughter for a while, neither sure why they were laughing or what was so funny, but the feeling was amazing, nonetheless.

As their laughter started to die down, Hunter looked up, “Hey! Bird tube! Mr convinced-is-a-

therapist-but-is-actually-a-kidnapper! We talked things out, kind of, let us go!”

“Oh, don’t be so harsh, he means well!” Lilith chuckled, wiping away tears.

“He locked us in a room, Lilith!”

“Ok, his methods are...unrefined...”

“That is one way to put it!” he grumbled, “Hey, did you hear us?” he yelled and when he got no reaction, he turned to Lilith, “Did he hear us?”

“Oh-oh---he might’ve...fallen asleep?”

Hunter facepalmed, “What?”

“Yes...probably.”

“Oh, come on! How do we wake him up?”

“Well, I know a way!” Lilith’s voice was somewhat smug as she walked over to the door, “This might look weird, but trust me, it will work,” with that, she started tickling the doorframe.

“The bird tube is...ticklish?” he asked, confused. This brought up another weird thought, “Wait, he can feel...the house?”

“Even I’m not sure to which extent, because he complains when Eda hits the wall, or if someone kicks a door, but not when she puts up a new picture. However, I know for certain,” she said smugly as she got to the corner of the doorframe, “he *is* ticklish.”

“So...if that is a particularly ticklish spot, are the door corners his...armpits?” Hunter asked, slightly disturbed by the implication.

“Better not to ponder it too much! Trust me on that one, you’ll save yourself a lot of mental anguish,” Lilith said and, for once, Hunter decided to heed her advice.

A few moments later, they heard high-pitched laughter, followed by an annoyed yawn, “Ok, ok, I’m up! Jeez, Lulu, way to rudely wake up our BFF!”

“*My BFF locked me and Hunter into the basement!*” Lilith said through gritted teeth and her smile was only a bit unhinged.

“Well, now, I need to hear you talking about something other than your EC time because, knowing you, you only spoke about that!”

“Seriously?” Hunter spread his arms in shock and had a hard time stopping himself from punching a wall.

Lilith’s eye twitched and she calmly walked down the basement stairs, grabbed the cushion she was sitting on minutes ago and screamed into it.

“Hootsifer, you are *really* walking that fine line right now,” she looked at the ceiling. His voice was calm, but it was that type of calmness that was usually followed by a person completely losing their cool.

“Nuh-uh! You need to find a topic!”

“What are we supposed to talk about?” Lilith asked, “The weather?”

“Um no, that is way too basic! No small talk!”

Lilith and Hunter exchanged an annoyed glance, “You know, I’m starting to question your taste in friends,” he sighed, then looked around himself, trying to find inspiration for a decent conversation between him and Lilith, “So, read any good books recently?” he asked. “I don’t recommend that one, it’s more mind-numbing than Kikimora’s monologues on her own importance.”

Lilith chuckled, “Well, there is one on Deadwardian bannisters. Did you know that prior to that era, the railings were remarkably simple...and you’re not interested...” she said as she realized his attention was not on her.

He cringed, “No, no, keep going!”

“No, Hooty won’t accept us *pretending* to talk,” Lilith huffed, “Did *you* read any interesting books?”

“Well, I’m reading up on wild magic,” he admitted, “You know, stuff I couldn’t read back at the castle. Wait, does this count as EC stuff?”

“I don’t know, I have a feeling he is just messing with us at this point. Oh, he is my best friend, but I could kill him right now...” she scowled at the ceiling.

“Trust me the feeling is mutual...” he eyed the ceiling angrily. Well, at least they could bond over how annoyed at Hooty they were.

“So, wild magic?” she asked tentatively. He took the bait.

“Yeah. I’ve always been interested in it. But here,” he smiled, “here I can actually learn about it. Luz is even teaching me glyphs.”

“Oh, they are fascinating, aren’t they?” Lilith asked. “So many possibilities! So many combinations!”

The two divulged into a surprisingly comfortable conversation about glyphs, their combinations and magic in general. Lilith told him about things Luz failed to mention, the rules, how the glyphs usually interacted and, he had to admit, Lilith’s mnemonics for remembering complicated glyphs helped him much more than Luz’s *IDK, they just stay seared into my mind* explanation.

“So, bird tube, was that enough?” Hunter asked at one point.

“Hmm, let me consider...” Hooty said.

“*Hootsifer!*” Lilith shouted.

At that moment, Hunter heard chirping. Through the tiny basement window, Flapjack flew into the room. Lilith’s palisman was also there, though, he was too big to pass through the small crack so he just stood in front of the window, waiting.

“Hey, buddy!” Hunter extended his hand and Flapjack perched on his finger.

*Read the note. Didn’t find you. Worried you got stuck.*

“Yeah, we did get stuck, but it wasn’t our fault,” Hunter said and then, in three sentences, explained what happened to Flapjack.

*Bad bird tube. Not lock my boy up. Not good!*

Hunter sighed, extending his arm and summoning his staff. He grabbed Lilith's arm with his free hand and the next moment, they found themselves in the hallway leading to the basement.

"Oh-oh!" Hooty gulped.

"Yeah, forgot I could do that, didn't you?" he said smugly to the house demon whose neck was extended so he was facing the basement door. Hunter flicked a finger at Hooty's forehead.

"Ow!"

"That is for locking us in the basement," he said and then lightly swatted him on the side with the staff, "And that is for scaring Flapjack!"

"Ow! Ok, ok, I'm sorry!"

"You better be! Lilith and I- Lilith?" he notices that she seemed even paler than usual as she leaned on the wall.

"I'm fine juts...teleportation...a warning next time," Lilith said, clutching her stomach.

"Ooof..." he cringed, "you ok?"

"Yeah yeah, I'll..." she gagged and swallowed, "I'll be fine. Just...teleportation, usually I'm fine, but, without a warning, on an empty stomach...it doesn't agree with me."

"Sorry."

"No, no! No need to apologize. You got us out of the basement, that is important. And now, *Hootsifer!*" she marched towards the living room, "Get over here!"

"What? My plan worked! Can you deny that!"

"You still locked us into a basement?" She pointed a finger at him, "What if one of us was claustrophobic? What if I got so stressed I transformed? What if something happened while you were asleep!"

"Sorry...I was just trying to help..." Hooty said sadly. "And I left elixirs in the basement, I'm not stupid."

"Well," Hunter came in and felt the tiniest bit of pity for the demon. Annoyed Lilith was *not* a pleasant sight, "In a really weird way you did..."

"Don't encourage him now."

"But he did help. We talked." He shrugged, then turned to the demon, angry, "But that was still uncool! Incredibly so!" he let go of Flapjack who went crazy on Hooty for a bit, pecking him around the face and...neck? Though Hunter knew the palisman was being careful, pecking just hard to sting without breaking the skin.

"Ok, Ok, ouch! I'm sorry! Jeez!"

"From now on, you're not allowed to lock people into rooms together, got it? Or I'll talk to Eda about this!" Lilith said strictly. Her palisman appeared as well and plucked a feather from Hooty's face as revenge for making him worry about his witch, "and now, I'm off to make myself some

morning tea! Something I didn't manage to do because I got. Locked. Into. A. Room."

"I know, Lulu," Hooty sagged, "I didn't think much."

"No, you thought *too* much," she rubbed her temples, "But, in the end," she smiled at Hunter, "he is right, you did help in a strange way. Just like you did with Luz, King and Eda. But if you ever lock me in the room again...I'm never having tea with you again!"

Hooty gasped, outraged, "No! Lulu!"

"Yes Lulu!" she grinned victoriously, "Now, I need a moment for myself!"

She stomped over to the kitchen, leaving Hunter and Hooty alone in the room. Hunter stood awkwardly, Flapjack settling on his shoulder. The palisman eyes Hooty for a few seconds warningly before he closed his eyes and fell asleep. Though Hunter could feel it, he was not in deep slumber. He was still alert enough to attack Hooty if the bird-tube decided to pull more tricks.

"So, ex-GG, are we friends now?" Hooty asked, grinning widely.

Hunter eyed him suspiciously, "Good acquaintances, for now."

"Aww..." Hooty hung his head down.

"Hey, I don't warm up to people that fast. Especially when they *lock me into the basement!*"

"Hey, you said it helped! Jeez, get over it!" Hooty rolled his eyes and Hunter stared at him incredulously. He had to give it to the Owl Lady, even if the bird was very, very occasionally a bit endearing, she had to have nerves of steel if she lived with him for a few decades.

The bird tube was persistent, "So, ex-GG are we-"

"Would you stop calling me ex-GG!" he snapped, "Do you have to rub it into my face?" he felt annoying tears prickle at the corners of his eyes. He expected Eda to rub his past into his face, or Lilith, even Luz. He didn't expect it coming from the bird tube. Maybe he even deserved it. But it didn't hurt any less.

"Rub what into your...oh," realization struck, and Hoot suddenly seemed horrified, "Oh, no, no! I didn't mean to rub your past into your face!"

"No, you just constantly called me the abbreviation of my former title! What did you think it would feel like?"

"Oh, I can really be a silly goose sometimes!" Hooty lamented, seemingly genuinely regretful, looking at Hunter with glistening eyes, "I meant to point out how you're the *former* golden guard, how you moved on, put it behind you. Didn't mean to come off mean. Sorry," he started to retreat towards his spot in the door defeatedly, sniffing.

Hunter stared at him, surprised, "Wait," he called the bird tube and Hooty snapped his head up hopefully, "That's actually a weirdly nice sentiment? I guess?"

"Are you asking me?"

"I don't know. Look, um, if you really meant it in a good way, then apology accepted, but that nickname...leaves a sour taste in my mouth," Flapjack woke up, feeling his distress and nuzzled against his neck. Hunter scratched him back, giving the bird a confirmation that he was ok. It also

kept him from attacking Hooty again. The bird tube seemed to mean well, it didn't need an angry palisman attacking him, "I'm still...processing a lot of things. So just...Hunter."

"Hmmm, how about Hunt-hunt?" Hooty suggested.

"NO! Sounds like some stupid game!"

"Just Hunt?"

"Oh my titan, what is with people in this house and nicknames?"

"You call Willow Captain!" Hooty pointed out.

Hunter felt his face flush, "That is a title, not a nickname! I don't call her Will-will!"

"So...no nickname for you?" Hooty asked sadly.

"Not really, no."

"Can *Hunty* work?"

"Ew, no!" Even Flapjack eyed Hooty with a *seriously dude*, "Just...Hunter, please! Or, if I absolutely must have a nickname, I'm not *that* bothered by Eda's *Blondie*."

"And then we can be friends?"

"Maybe...."

"Yaaay!" Hooty screeched, nuzzling against Hunter's cheek. Hunter grunted, trying to escape the stupid bird tube, but, at the same time, he found him oddly endearing. He awkwardly patted him on the head.

"Hey, you two!" Lilith called from the kitchen. Flapjack chirped irritably, "Sorry, you three. I'm making myself tea, and I can make you some, but I also want some breakfast, so I'm making pudding! Come on, before the other get up! We early birds will get the boo-berry pudding! Maybe, that will teach them a lesson! Don't sleep in until eleven o'clock!"

"Doubt it," Hunter sighed, "but pudding sounds nice."

He walked over to the kitchen, followed by Hooty's constant yammering about some very annoying postman.

Things really were changing. He was, kind off, getting along with Hooty. He and Lilith...well, they still weren't close. They weren't friends. But they didn't hate each other. And now Lilith was cooking breakfast for all three of them. Maybe things would turn out for the better.

If you told him that this would be happening three months ago he would've called in Hetty Cutburn because she, as the head healer, was the only one qualified to deal with that level of delusions. (Even though, from his own experience, there was nothing *worse* for an injured or sick person than having to interact with Hetty. Even warden Wrath had a warmer personality.)

But these were not delusions. It was a strange, ridiculous reality that he, surprisingly, didn't hate.

In fact, especially once Eda, Luz, King and the palismen came down, he had to admit, he quite liked it.



## Chapter End Notes

Yes, this is the "Hooty continues to be an MVP in his own way" chapter. Also, yes, the interactions in here are the result of me seeing Dana's art again and wondering "Hm, how would these two interact?"

I'm not super happy with how the flow of this turnout out, I expected it to go better, but, you know what? Maybe it's for the better. Neither Lilith nor Hunter are particularly great with emotions and emotional conversations so, being messy and a bit incoherent makes sense. Also, this chapter went WAAAY differently than I thought it would.

I do believe that Lilith and Hunter did have moments in EC where they had to work together and were, at least to a degree, able to put their differences aside. I also like the idea that, once some time passes and they are more comfortable around each other, the two would actually get along swimmingly. Both are studious and curious. In fact, I can see the two and Luz nerding out about glyphs and wild magic.

Also, you bet that at some point, Hooty will be like "Hey, Blondie! Have I ever told you about that time I totally kicked Lilith's butt?"

Hunter: \*smug as hell\* No, you didn't, bird tube, please, tell me more!

Lilith: \*face completely red, burying her face into a cushion\*

Hunter: Tell me more...

Comments are very much appreciated, they make my day. I love to hear everyone's thoughts and input. Did you like it? Did you hate it? Did I hit the nail on the head or am I missing something?

Thanks for reading and stay tuned for next time...hopefully it will take me less than a month this time!

# Raine

## Chapter Notes

So...it's been a long time since I posted the last chapter, right? But I haven't forgotten about this fic!

This is an idea I randomly got back in July because I want more Hunter&Raine interactions.

Also, the beginning, the italic part is sort of a recap of what happened in this canon divergence of mine in the episodes after Hollow Mind. If you don't want to read what are essentially brief summaries of my rewrites and just want to see Raine and Hunter talking, skip to the non-italic text.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Once again, Hunter woke up from a nightmare. Flapjack was already awake, chirping worriedly next to him. He took the small bird into his hands, and scratched his head, for his own and the palisman's comfort.

As the images of Belos, his friends Being injured, the house he briefly called home Being destroyed faded out of his mind, he looked at Luz and King on the bottom bunk. They were both still asleep. He was glad, especially for King's sake. He needed it after what he discovered a few days ago.

Hunter laid down on the bed, even though he knew there was virtually no chance of falling asleep again. He stared at the brown ceiling above him, trying to calm his mind.

*It's been an exhausting few days. Darius and Raine got wind of the things stirring up at the castle and, after a rather risky attempt at an investigation, it became clear that Belos was about to send scouts put to look for the two kids that entered Belos' mind.*

*Hunter hated to admit that hearing this news from Eda made him go into a full-blown panic attack. He managed to calm down and spent most of the night in a restless sleep. When, at one point, he wanted to go downstairs and make himself and Luz' some hot chocolate, he overheard Eda and Lilith, discussing the news from the castle, he also overheard a rumour that Belos wanted to brand all the unbranded witches.*

*It took Hunter a moment what exactly that meant. There was a whole group of witches the adults seemed to forget about.*

*The students. Which involved his friends at Hexside.*

*Without thinking, he rushed to Hexside, still in his pyjamas and all. He barely took a moment to pick up Flapjack and write a note to Luz. And good thing he did, because Belos didn't wait those two days. When the school day started, the scouts and Adrian Graye were already there, about to brand students. Before Hunter could reveal his disguise, Gus stepped in, turning the entire school into a giant illusion which, eventually, helped them defeat the scouts and Graye.*

*After the incident, a rather frustrated Darius came to school to pick him up. Hunter had to admit,*

*the man had the right to be angry. After everything he and the others did to keep Hunter safe, he left in the crack of dawn, risking his life and safety, leaving only a vague note for Luz. Frankly, it was a miracle she didn't Rush after him. After a tirade about Hunter's recklessness and thoughtlessness, Darius softened when Hunter said he simply wanted to protect his friends and admitted that it was an oversight not to check on the schools earlier.*

*"Do communicate your suspicion next time, ok, little Prince?"*

*"I hope there won't be the next time..."*

*"Yeah, me too."*

*He didn't want to leave, but it was agreed that he would be safer away from the school and that the school would be safer without him there as well. After all, Belos may brush some teen rebellion aside, but not if he was involved.*

*That's when Darius dragged him over to the Knee, where the three Clawthornes, Luz and Hooty were hiding in the cave.*

*"It's not perfect, but it's the safest place for you until we find a better hide-out, little prince," Darius said.*

*"When we found out you were gone, we got worried," Luz rushed to him, pulling him into a tight hug, her eyes sad and a bit angry. That look stuck with him, "Even with your note, telling us where you were going..." she shook her head, "You should've woken me up, idiot!" she punched him into the shoulder lightly, but then pulled him into another hug. "I'm just glad you're ok.*

*"I told you, you didn't have to-"*

*"Worry?" Eda took over, her voice sharper than Luz's, "Well, tough luck kid, you got the Clawthornes to worry about you. And this one," she pointed to Hooty, "got so upset he puked garbage all over my living room."*

*"Sorry," Hunter said sheepishly.*

*"It's fine," Eda sighed and ruffled his hair, "Just don't pull anything like that again, ok?"*

*"So, what happened with you guys while I was gone? It's only been a day!" he asked. Even if they weren't currently hiding in the cave instead of the Owl House, just from the way King curled up in Eda's lap, with Luz buried into her side and Hooty coiling up next to them, he could see something was off.*

*The demon started talking. How there was a letter for king he forgot about in the junk mail he threw up. How it wasn't junk mail at all, but instead a letter from King's alleged family. How King wanted to go find them, while not wanting to leave his with/human family behind. How Luz was torn between waiting for him to return and following King on his quest, and how King didn't want to pressure her.*

*Eda, Lilith and Raine had to work hard to convince the two to go on their quest with Hooty as a chaperon because they had the search for Hunter covered. How Eda and Lilith had to escape the Owl House when it was swarmed by the scouts, while Darius and Eber were looking for him all the while Raine was managing to cover for all of them.*

*"I'm sorry I made a mess of things," he said.*

*"It's ok," Luz said, "I'd do the same thing in your place. We all would."*

*And then, they continued their tale, finishing it with the unbelievable truth. There was no tribe of great demon warriors that King belonged to. Just a group of witches that worshipped a strange god and were bound on hunting titans. And King was one of the said titans.*

*King was a Titan. On the one hand, the truth of his origin sounded unconceivable. Eda's tiny, cuddly, fussy kid being the son of the titan they walked on? He felt like he was stuck in a strange dream and should have woken up already. Naturally, he felt like that ever since he found out the truth about Belos, so, he concluded, this was probably truth as well. He could relate to the little guy, he knew what it felt like to have your entire view of yourself crushed and what it felt like to be the only one of your kind, while not knowing anything about said kind.*

*It sucked.*

*So many things changed in one day. Again. Just as he was getting used to the change he already went through. He felt a strange feeling of loss when he thought about the Owl House. He didn't realize how attached he got to the place. Lilith and Eda were growing more desperate, and Darius and Raine were in a pickle without a proper hideout only days before the Day of Unity.*

*One day into their stay at the cave he overheard Eda talking to Raine through the crystal ball. Raine and Darius were afraid eyes might be on them and they had to calculate each of their moves carefully, especially while they were hiding Eda and Lilith and covering from Hunter's appearance and disappearance at the school.*

*And that's when he overheard Eda suggesting handing herself over, so all eyes could be on her, as she sent Luz, King and Hunter away.*

*As a horrible wave of guilt washed over him, because, who knows, maybe none of them could be in that position if it weren't for him, he heard Luz behind his back.*

*"You're sending me away?"*

*An awful fight sparked between the mentor and the student, in the middle of which King ran off to who knows where leaving Hunter and Lilith to go looking for him.*

*He was caught by the scouts, and, from their conversation, he realized, so were Luz and Eda. He tried his best to fight but to no avail. At least King and Lilith got away, he hoped. He didn't dare hope that Darius and Raine would save them. Not because he doubted them, but because they already had so much going on. Would they really risk blowing their cover for them?*

*Well, maybe for Eda and Luz but for him...*

*As the prison cart rolled down the road with him shackled inside, he felt fear like never before. He was barely keeping himself together and the only thing that kept him going was thinking that, if they got a chance to escape, Luz and Eda would need his help. When the carriage stopped, he felt his heart sinking, only to feel confusion and careful hope when he heard sounds of fighting and a body falling to the ground. The next moment the door of the carriage was blasted by a strong bard spell, courtesy of a young bard, Amber.*

*She led him down the road where Katya and Derwin, two more bards, waited with Eda. He expected her to be relieved. He didn't expect a hug.*

*Raine, Darius and Eber finally managed to establish a proper hideout, instead of sneaking around the castle and night market, the bards told them. Raine, Lilith and, of all people, Steve, who*

*rebelled on his own terms, waited for them there.*

*When Darius finally brought Luz over, the girl ran up to him and pulled him into a bone-crushing hug. That one, he expected.*

And now there he was, on the top bunk of the room he was shared with Eda, Luz, Lilith, Hooty and King. Eda snored away and she was so loud he doubted he'd be able to sleep even if he didn't just wake up from a nightmare. Lilith was not even in the bed, she fell asleep on the floor or the living space with Hooty. Eda and Darius just dragged them, carpet and all, into their bedroom. Luz slept in the lower bunk, King curled up next to her.

He rubbed his eyes. His nightmare once again put him into Belos' mind, however, instead of the creepy forest the space looked like the bigger version of the cart he was shackled in. Darius and Eda were there, screaming at him about his bad choices and then they turned into Belos' cursed form. Instead of the soul of a palisman, he crushed his friends. Willow, Gus, Viney, Skara and Luz were-

His unconscious mind was really Great at finding new ways to torture him. He had to get out of that room. He disentangled himself from the blanket, shushing an upset Flapjack so he wouldn't wake his sleeping roommates.

"I'm fine, Flap," he said, 'it was just a bad dream."

*Not fine. Should sleep.*

"Can't sleep. How am I supposed to sleep next to that," he pointed his chin to Eda who sounded like an old gryphon with a sinus infection.

*Earmuffs, Flapjack suggested. Hunter rolled his eyes. Ask bards for a sound block spell.*

"I'll be fine, Flap."

He made a small note for Luz, *Had a nightmare, in the kitchen having hot chocolate.*

He had to give it to her. That drink was comforting. He didn't know whose idea it was to save it from the Owl house after the raid, but he knew he saw the container in the kitchen earlier.

When he got to the kitchen-dining area, he realised he wasn't alone, as Raine sat at the table, bent over a bunch of maps and notes. Next to them was an empty mug and the room smelled like mulled Apple blood. Was there a single person in that place with what Gus would describe as a *decent sleep schedule*?

"Oh, hi' they lifted their eyes from their project with a comforting smile, "can't sleep?"

"Yeah. Nightmare. And Eda snores like a slitherbeast," he sighed.

Raine chuckled, "She always was a snorer."

"Why are you awake?"

They rubbed their temple, "I've got a lot on my mind," they gestured vaguely, a pen in their hand.

Hunter looked over the mess on in front of the bard. Right under their hand, Standing apart from various notes, files and scribbles, was the plan of the skull, or rather, the area right in front of it. The dais.

“Could I help?” he offered.

“Oh,” Raine smiled, “no, no it’s fine. I just have to-“

“But I could help!” Hunter offered again. He realised how desperate he sounded and he felt his face flush, “Sorry. I just...”

“You want to help,” Raine's voice was calm and understanding, “I can see that. I don’t think there is anyone here who doesn’t see it. And I’m not doubting your ability or willingness.. But you should rest.”

*See even Raine agreed. Listen to Raine!* Flapjack chirped into Hunter's ear.

He ignored his palisman, fully aware that Flap's next step would be either pulling his hair or pecking his ear, “What about you?” he asked Raine instead.

“Well, I started this whole rebellion mess, and dragged you into it, I think it’s fair I pull a bit more weight,” Raine smiled.

Hunter frowned at that, not sure what to think of that answer. “Um, would you like some hot chocolate?” he asked instead.

Raine smiled, "Sure. Add some hell pepper powder in mine. You have it in the second cabinet on the left."

"Hell peppers?" Hunter wondered. Once, during training, one of the older scouts challenged him to eat one. The only reason why Hunter didn’t spend the entire night awake from how burned his entire mouth felt was that Steve rushed in with a bottle of spider milk. Where did the scout find a spider to milk, Hunter didn't know.

"Oh, yeah. I love spicy good,” Raine said

"Huh...is that why Eda Always had spicy food at home even though nobody really likes it?" Hunter asked as he took out the ingredients for the hot chocolate and started to prepare it the way Luz showed him the first day. He found a bottle of spider milk and a bottle of boorly milk in the fridge. He took the former, leaving the latter for Luz.

"What?" Raine dropped their pen, blushing deeply.

"Oh, you didn't know?" Hunter wondered whether he just revealed something he shouldn't have.

"No, but...I'm glad."

“Whose idea was it to save hot chocolate powder out of all the things confiscated from the Owl House? Of all the things Eda owns...”

“Well, if things go according to plan, all of those things should be returned once Bel- I mean once this is all over,” Raine quickly corrected themselves.

“You wanted to say once Belos is defeated, right?” Hunter asked, “It’s ok. You can say it. I know it has to happen,” before Raine could have a chance to say something to it, Hunter asked again, “So, whose idea was it?”

“Oh,” they chuckled, “Eda’s. She insisted we take only a few items. That bunny for King, some gryphon eggs, a box with *Eda’s longest toenails*-don’t worry,” they added when they noticed

Hunter's face, "it was actually a decoy, Luz' palistorm wood was in it, hot chocolate..."

"Yeah, Luz loves it," Hunter said, "I picked the habit up from her."

"I don't think she took it just because Luz loves it," Raine mentioned, "Because she also said to bring a T-shirt *you* seemed to become quite fond of."

Hunter knew he blushed again, "The wolf one?" his brain short-circuited. Sure, he could accept that Eda cared for him, but to the point where, out of everything she owned, she asked for Raine to save something important to *him*? That sounded impossible. "No, no, you must be wrong! I mean, maybe Eda actually really like the shirt! Or Lilith or-" they stopped, noticing Raine's gaze- They stared at him over the rim of their glasses, their eyebrows raised.

"Well...it's just...she wouldn't..."

"She would," they smiled, their voice calm but not allowing an argument.

"Fine! I like the shirt," he wiped away the few stupid, errant tears. Why was he crying? He should be happy! "Could...do you have it?"

"Darius insisted we wash it," Raine rolled their eyes, "according to him, an item of clothing should not be worn for longer than two days."

"Oh..."

"But," the bard said, got up, and briefly left into the living area "I had Eber get it from the bathroom for you. Here," they handed Hunter a small, black bundle.

Hunter stared at the item of clothing in his hands before he put it over the long-sleeved shirt he wore. As he pulled it over his head, he realized, it smelled like the Owl House. For some reason, that fact brought him comfort.

"Thanks," he said, redirecting his thoughts before he did something stupid. Like crying again, for example. "So, I should probably not tell him I wore these pants for a week, should I?"

Raine chuckled, "No, not unless you plan to annoy him and get annoyed back by his nagging over *washing your clothes properly*."

Hunter chuckled, feeling slightly uncomfortable, but he decided that, if Raine was joking about Darius, it was ok, "Here, be careful, it's hot. And I hope I didn't overdo it with hell pepper powder," he handed the bard the finished drink.

Raine took a sip, "No, it's perfect. Hey, could you hand me that pen I dropped?" Raine asked, but Hunter didn't reach for it. "Hunter?"

The boy started into the one spot on the paper and Raine realised. There was a portrait of Belos on it. The boy's eyes became unfocused and his forehead was covered in sweat. He clutched the mug as if his life depended on it, his scarred knuckles turning white.

"Oh no!" Raine quickly covered the drawing, cursing themselves, "Hunter?" they gently tapped his shoulder, "Hey Hunter?"

The boy flinched violently, "No, uncle, stop! DON'T TOUCH ME!" He showed their hand off, and kicked, his leg landing in Raine's stomach. Raine doubled over with a painful grunt, and the force of the kick sent Hunter falling off the chair, the sound of the body landing on the floor

accompanied by the sound of the broken ceramic.

'Hunter!' Raine shouted in concern, their own pain was forgotten when they witnessed the cut on Hunter's hand. Hunter's palisman frantically flapped around the boy's face, his chirps high-pitched and alarmed.

"Oh Titan," Raine crouched next to the boy, "hey! Hunter, can you hear me? Kid, are you with me?"

Hunter turned his face to them but, it was as if he stared through them. Flapjack looked at Raine desperately, as if demanding the bard to help his person. Raine absent-mindedly scratched the bird's head, but most of their focus was on Hunter.

"Ok, Hunter, can you focus on my voice?"

"I-I-"

"It's ok, you don't have to talk," Raine said gently, trying to keep their voice level, "I'm sorry I spooked you. Now, can you breathe with me?"

Hunter, his gaze becoming clearer, lifted his hand. HE raised Four fingers, "Gus...breathe thing..."

Raine remembered what Hunter told them about what happened at school and his friendship with Perry's kid, "That's right. Gus' breathing thing. Slowly, just stay with me. Focus on my voice. Or, on Flapjack, if that is easier for you," they suggested as the bird skipped nervously around Hunter.

Hunter managed to calm down slowly, clutching his shirt to ground himself as he held up four fingers of his other hand, counting to four over and over again as the world around him properly came to focus. When he calmed down somewhat, he felt a familiar weight land on his knee. It was Flapjack who, ever so carefully, lied there, mindful not to alarm Hunter again. Hunter petted his head as he focused on the world around him.

"Oh..." Hunter looked at the shattered ceramics on the ground and the concerned bard in front of him, "I kicked you, didn't I? And shattered your mug! I'm sorry!"

"No need to apologise. I shouldn't have touched you while you were panicking," Raine said. "I'm sorry."

"It's stupid."

"It's not stupid," Raine echoed Luz's words from a few nights earlier. "Are you feeling better?"

Hunter took another deep breath, "I'm...I'll...I'll be fine."

Raine nodded, getting to their feet, "Come on, Let's get you patched up."

"I can handle it," Hunter clutched his injured hand.

*Let them help. Let them help,* Flapjack insisted.

"I know you can, but you shouldn't handle everything on your own. Nobody should," the bard smiled warmly and held out a hand for Hunter.

The boy sighed, but nodded and took it, allowing Raine to help him up. He sat by the counter as Raine reached for the first aid kit, "Now, Steve would probably be better help here, since he can heal this with magic--"



"It's ok," Hunter said, "I'm...used to things healing with minimal magic help. Don't wake Steve up for this."

Raine narrowed their eyes, "What do you mean..."

"Unc-I mean...*he* didn't like magic being used on me. I guess I get it now since he hates magic on general. But, yeah, when I would get injured, unless I was in danger, I'd have to heal it...the natural way. I managed to sneak some healing glyphs and healing potions later but...yeah. This, this is nothing."

Under the concern on Raine's face, anger simmered, "I...I'm sorry."

They were aware that Hunter had scars, of course. But they assumed he simply Got himself into a scrape bad enough that healing spells could not prevent the scarring. They had a few injuries like that, they knew Eda did too.

Guilt gnawed at their stomach, as realised they were not paying attention to the obvious truth

"Everyone keeps apologising even if it's not their fault," Hunter chuckled bitterly.

Raine looked away, as if something was on their mind, "That wasn't ok, you know that? It would be one thing if we *didn't* have the resources, but we do. And, this may not be a big injury, but it's *not* nothing. Ask Steve for help in the morning, he can speed the healing process up."

"I...I know. Now. I know now that it wasn't ok. I think. It's...confusing," Hunter said. "It's just... part of me wishes I didn't know that? You know? It's...hard to know that your entire life was messed up. And...there were things I was scared of before, but not like now," he glanced at the table where that drawing of Belos was now covered with foles, "As if it's not enough he is in my dreams, I can't even see a picture of him without breaking down..."

Raine looked at the boy in front of them. They wanted to say, *it's ok ok* or *it's normal*, but, they realised, it wasn't. It was *expected* for someone who went through what Hunter went through to feel the way he did. It wasn't a failure of any kind of Hunter's part, but none of his situations was *ok*. But Raine had a feeling Hunter didn't want to hear all that, so, instead, they took a different approach.

"Did Eda or Luz tell you what happened when Eda and I first fought Darius?"

The boy nodded, "Yeah. Um...so, Eda helped you and the BATs and then you were caught by Darius and Eber. You didn't know they were also working against Belos, and they had to keep up appearances, so you fought. You stayed behind, letting Eda escape and then Kikimora came and activated your sigil, and you..." he noticed Raine flinching and reaching for their right forearm. "Sorry."

"No, no, it's ok. I asked you, and you simply gave an answer," They smiled lightly, not a hint of anger on their face, "See, now I know that once Kiki was out of the picture I wasn't even in any kind of danger. But sometimes, remembering what happened there, the level of powerlessness, the pain, being paralyzed...it stuck with me. Going through something traumatic Will Always leave a Mark, and you at 16 went through more than most people go through in their lives," they finished wrapping Hunter's hand and put their own over it, "Being, as you put it, messes up about it doesn't make you weak, or less then. It's not a normal situation, but it's a normal reaction."

"Is it also normal to wish to go back to...before?" Hunter wondered. "I...know before...I knew the truth?"

Raine sighed and stared in the distance, their face conflicted as if they remembered something they didn't like, "When I first realised that something didn't add up, I would sometimes stay up at night wishing I could forget," they started, "You're right, it's never easy accepting that what you believed was so wrong."

"Now, I knew that the wild magic was not *as* evil as Belos made it out to be. I never believed that the wild witches were dangerous, that they attacked anyone who would cross them, that they stole children or whatever the rumours say. I knew Eda after all," they chuckled with a lovesick expression.

"She was chaotic, rebellious, still is, but she was not malicious."

"Yeah," Hunter smiled, "I never expected *the Owl Lady* to be kind, least of all to me, but she is."

"That's Eda for you, snarky and mischievous, but she had an incredibly good heart. And even though I knew all that, even though I believed *she* made the right choice, I still believed it was still a good system and then," they shrugged, "I couldn't deny that it wasn't any longer. But it was hard. It was incredibly hard to admit I was working for, helping uphold the system that was wrong and, worst of all, hurt someone I lo-cared for."

"It's just...ever since, you know, the emperor's mind. I know what I should do now, what is good and how to help but...part of me wishes to go back. Things were simpler back then, less care and...I didn't" he tried to stop the tears from spilling, "I didn't have to Admit I did bad things... Isn't that cowardly?"

*Not coward! Good boy! Brave boy!* Flapjack chirped on his shoulder.

"No! No, Hunter, listen to me. *Listen* to me," Raine looked him directly in his eyes, "There is *nothing* cowardly about it, ok. It's normal. And far from being a coward you are an *immensely* brave person. Possibly too brave for your own good," they said.

"What...what do you mean?"

"I saw how determined you were on all your missions. Darius told me how you faced him to save your friends," they said, "and I saw how scared you are of Belos, not that there's anything wrong with being scared. You have every right to be. But you're still here, and a few days ago, you went to help your friends despite the danger. You kept him safe despite the danger because he is your friend," Raine pointed to the palisman, "and Luz told us how you helped her in the emperor's mind. Which...I think I owe you an apology for that."

"What?"

"If we weren't there, doing an *impossibly* dangerous thing in the middle of the night, in public, you wouldn't have to go through that, well I don't think the words living nightmare do it justice."

Hunter chuckled bitterly, "Trust me, as someone who had plenty of nightmares, it's a pretty apt description. And it's not your fault. I followed you there,"

"Still, it was my plan. Darius suggested we wait, or try to find a better, safer spot. But now, I pushed to go through with the plan, Eber agreed and...you know the rest."

"Still, it's not like you dragged me in there. I followed you, Luz followed me, we activated the spell...it was an accident."

"I could've helped when I realised someone was trapped in the circle. Or, at the very least, I would

have approached Eda with the potion needed to break the spell sooner. But, no,” they laughed joylessly, “My need to protect Eda, who I knew would have no objection if anyone suggested she join us, resulted in you, and Luz, being hurt. You were both in danger, you arguably more than her because of what Belos is like. I’m sorry, Hunter. And I think the apology for not being more supportive or attentive before all this is also long overdue.”

Hunter blinked. This was not the first apology he received that week. It wasn’t even the first apology he received for the perceived lack of care back during the coven days, as he still remembered his and Lilith’s conversation in the Owl House basement.

“It’s ok,” Hunter said, and when he noticed that Raine was about to argue he raised his palm, “no, really, it is. The coven days... they were what they were, it’s behind us. And the emperor’s mind... I...it was a horrible experience, I won’t deny it. But I still don’t think it’s your, or anyone’s, fault we ended up there. It just...happened. And, well, at least I know the truth now. I don’t think I would realise it, at least not on time, if it didn’t happen the way it did.”

“I’m still sorry you had to go through it. Or that I didn’t help you get out earlier.”

Hunter shrugged, “That’s ok too. I get why,” he offered a smile, “I know you really care about Eda.”

“It shouldn’t have come to anyone else’s expense,” Raine lamented.

“Well,” Hunter scratched his head awkwardly, “It seems like we’re not the most rational or considerate when people we care for are in danger, right? I mean, at least you didn’t run away, in your pyjama and Eda’s borrowed house robe, to the school while Belos was on the lookout for you,” he chuckled, running his hand through his hair, “Oh, titan, when I say it like that...yeah, I can now fully grasp why you were all upset.”

“It’s ok. Everything ended well, and your intervention proved crucial. Just, tell us next time, ok?”

Hunter nodded, “Yeah. It’s not that I didn’t trust you, it’s that...I’m so used to doing things myself, the idea of asking for help didn’t even occur to me. But I know what to do if something similar happens again. And, well, since I was never angry at you in the first place, I guess...apology accepted?”

Raine nodded, “Thanks. How about I make you another cup of hot chocolate, hm?”

“I can-yeah, that...actually sounds nice,” he relaxed for a moment, with Flapjack resting in his hair. However, allowing Raine to help was one thing. Calming his racing mind was another. So, he reached for the diagrams and plans in front of him, carefully removing the pile of files under which he knew the drawing of Belos was. No need to trigger himself *again*.

He looked over the plans of the Skull. Very few people were allowed there. The scouts that would help out with the portal would be taken there through a rather long, convoluted underground path so they could not easily find it in the case of rebellion. All the entrances were well-guarded by high-positioned members of the emperor’s coven. Only Belos and the Golden Guards knew the entire layout of the skull.

Or maybe it was only Belos. Who knew how many secrets he held that Hunter, or any of his predecessors, weren’t privy to? Who knew what kinds of horrors the skull hid?

“Here,” Raine placed the cup in front of him, “Would you like some cinnamon with that?”

“Hm, sure?” Hunter shrugged, “I only ever had crab apple pie with it. Sometimes, scouts would get

desserts. It was almost always crab Apple pie. I liked it.”

“It’s good with hot chocolate too, trust me. Even if I prefer hell peppers.”

“Why? It makes your mouth feel like it’s on fire!”

Raine shrugged, “I just love the taste and the spice. Ok, since I can’t seem to stop you from looking over those, I may as well ask if you know anything.”

“Actually, I do,” Hunter grinned, confidently. “Ok, so, here,” he marked a line on the map, “under the dais, there are rooms only a few people know about. I’m...not actually supposed to know about them either, so it may be that Belos and I, maybe Lilith, are aware of them.”

“Lilith already put in all of her notes,” Raine said, “these are all of her additions,” he pointed to the nicely drawn lines and words written in lovely cursive, “I doubt she would miss something that might be this important. It may be a very helpful addition. If we hide here...wait, how do you get there?”

“Oh right...so...” Hunter took out the map of the entire area and marked the secret passage that led to the space under the dais. “Here, this is how you can get there from the outside. Another thing I probably should not know about...”

“Well, there was always a bit of that rebellious spirit in you.”

Hunter shrugged, “Maybe. I search the Skull for...a way to help him. So, maybe not that rebellious after all....”

“Hunter,” Raine reached out for his shoulder and waited for Hunter to nod before they placed their hand there, “don’t feel bad for wanting to help, ok. Belos may not be a good person, but he was your uncle. And your desire to help came from a good place. A place of caring.”

Hunter nodded, “Yeah, ok, thanks. And...well,” he said, a bit awkward, “I may or may not have done some of that exploration just for exploration’s sake. I even discovered a small crack, probably a vein channel or something even he didn’t know about, or I’m assuming, considering the amount of overgrowth in there.” he bragged.

“Anyways,” he said, trying to restrain himself from babbling too much, “If you’re aiming for the dais, which, even without knowing your full plan yet, I’m assuming because how else should you disrupt the draining spell except by being at the very centre of it? So, If you need to get a few people there,” he marked a place near the wall of the area, “Is probably the best place to sneak in. Especially if whoever is entering wears disguises!”

Raine stared at him.

Hunter felt his face flush again, "Oh, sorry, Got a bit over-excited. I just...know the layout of the Skull well and-"

"Hunter, calm down," Raine said, a grin appearing in their face, "I'm just pleased, this is a helpful information. And, yes, you picked up on the details of the plan correctly. Good Job kid,"

"Really?"

"Yes-of course-oof..." Hunter suddenly pulled them into a hug. They were taken slightly off-guard and Hunter seemed to take their hesitation as a sign of discomfort.

The boy's ears even turned red, and he started to let go, "Oh...sorry, I didn't mean to..."

"It's fine, get here," Raine hugged him back.

"Thanks," Hunter said.

"For what?"

"Being kind," the boy muttered into their shoulder, "It's nice...to be appreciated for real."

"Always, kiddo," they patted Hunter's back.

They broke the hug and set next to each other on the bench. Hunter sipped on his hot chocolate, but he was yawning more and more by the minute, and, at one point, his head fell on Raine's shoulder. The bard carefully placed an arm around his shoulders, and Flapjack nested in his lap.

"How about I get him to bed, huh?" Raine quietly asked the bird who chirped and nodded. He flew on their shoulder as they shifted so they could still prop Hunter up as they got to their feet and into a good position to pick the boy into their arms. They were careful not to jolt him awake as they pulled their arms under his body.

"He was very tired, wasn't he?" Raine asked the palisman, looking at the boy's exhausted face, "Did he even sleep last night?"

Flapjack lightly scratched their shoulder twice.

"Two? Two hours?" they asked in shock. Flapjack chirped and they could feel the frustration in his voice, "No wonder you're already asleep," they shifted so they could properly carry Hunter in their arms.

"Can walk myself..."

"It's ok, I got you," They picked him up. He was lighter than they expected.

They carried him over to the room where he slept, careful not to wake anyone, but Luz was up already and sat up as they walked in.

"Can't sleep either?" they asked her.

She smiled, "No, it's fine. I was just about to fall asleep again. King kicked me in his sleep and woke me up, but shhh, it's fine." Luz explained. "Don't worry, the two of us are ok. I'll climb up so you can place Hunter here," she picked King up, "Come on little guy, we're going up."

"Nyeh..." King muttered in his sleep but didn't otherwise react.

Raine placed the half-asleep teenager on the bottom bunk and pulled the cover over him.

"King's plushie..." Hunter muttered, pulling something from underneath him.

"Oh," Raine took the small rabbit from him and handed it to Luz, "Here. Don't let the little guy be without his friend."

"No, no we can't..." Luz muttered.

Flapjack nested next to Hunter and the boy pulled him closer, burying himself in the blankets.

"I knew you would be good with kids," they heard a raspy whisper from the other top bunk.

They looked at her in surprise, "Eda..."

"What? You are," she smiled at them resting her head on her folded arms.

"Not better than you."

"Eh, I'm all right," she said, but he could say tht she was glad for the compliment, "Ugh, I need to stretch, come on, move," she climbed down from her bed and hooked their arm into hers, leading them outside of the room. They stopped by the door, Eda leaving on the door frame and Raine leaned on her. They were pensive, and they knew they weren't hiding it well from the way Eda looked at them.

She elbowed them lightly, "He looks peaceful, they all do."

They frowned, "Luz had her mother, and she had you. So does King. The BATs have me. But Hunter...he deserved so much better," Raine said sadly.

"Well, he's got all of us now," Eda smiled, "even Darius, though that stubborn idiot won't admit he cares," she rolled her eyes.

"Hm, I wonder who he reminds me off..."

"Rainstorm," she looked at them with feigned annoyance, "you didn't just compare me to Darius..."

"And what if I had?" they asked and she poked them in their side, before they turned serious again. They looked at the sleeping boy, "I have things to make up for."

Eda took their hand, "You know, you said I'm good with kids, but I haven't yet gotten that one to fall asleep in my arms. I think you're already doing great. And things can only become better from here."

## Chapter End Notes

The spider milk idea came from AnimationAdventures on Tumblr. You can enjoy and another user exchanging ideas for various BI versions of food here:  
<https://www.tumblr.com/animationadventures/701642305786019840/therivergirl-animationadventures-therivergirl>

As I was writing this, YT decided I needed to see a video about foster care in the US. Why? I don't know. I'm neither from the US and I don't plan to foster, especially not any time soon. But I did learn one thing from the video-not to wash comfort items from kids if not absolutely necessary. So...yeah, that is where the moment with the wolf shirt comes from.

Feel free to leave a comment, it's really one of the best motivations to keep writing! Otherwise, thanks for reading and stay tuned for the next chapter: Darius (or...dadrius?)

# Darius

## Chapter Notes

Sory for the delay. I got way too invested in another WIP and yeah...

But now, enjoy some Darius and Hunter bonding!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There were only two days until the Day Of Unity. Three days until either the emperor would be toppled, or the world would end. Despite this, the feeling of urgency at the hideout was rather mild that afternoon. The breakfast passed peacefully, the morning meeting, somehow, even more so and now they were experiencing that awkward pre-lunch period during which nobody who wasn't making said lunch didn't exactly know what to do with themselves.

Eda and Raine borrowed two concealment stones so she could fly them over to a nearby hill. Steve, Hooty, and Katya were making lunch, Lilith was taking a nap with King and Darius was reviewing some of the rebellion-related plans.

"Hey, Hunter," Luz asked, "Have you seen my jacket?"

"Nope!" he answered, his eyes locked on a book, "why?"

"I'm just going out to teach Derwin and Amber some glyphs! Eh, I probably left it in the room."

"You should probably patch it before you wear it anyway," Derwin suggested. "Hey Darius, you sew, don't you?"

"Mhm...yes, yes, I'll get to it, just let me do this now," Darius answered.

"Hunter, wanna join us?" Luz asked.

"Nope, need to finish the book!"

"Ugh nerd," Amber answered, "Come on, come on! I want to learn the fire spell!"

"Ok, ok! Hunter, join us at any time if you want, we'll be on the balcony!" Luz shouted as she was dragged out by Amber.

"Sure!" he answered, and waited for the door to close. He gave them a few minutes and, when he was certain Luz' would not immediately barge back on, he drew her jacket from under the couch cushion. He felt a bit bad about lying, but, Derwin was right, it had to be fixed. He could do this patch job, he was confident enough in that. Darius was busy, and so was everyone, so why not help his friend himself? They did so much for him, this was the least he could do to return the favour.

He started sewing, making sure his stitches were as neat as possible and the silence was only broken by occasional mutterings from Darius or laughter from the kitchen.

"Could you go and help me with something, Little Prince?" Darius asked suddenly.

"Sure," Hunter said, setting the needle down, "what is it?"

"There is a box in my room, on the top shelf, the red box, not the white one, could you go grab it for me?"

"Sure thing," Hunter shrugged. He rushed to the room Darius, Eber and Raine shared and only there did he realize he took the jacket with him. He huffed in annoyance and placed it on one of the beds, presumably Darius' since it was the only one made and it was covered with a purple throw blanket.

The top shelf was just above the height Hunter could comfortably reach. He stretched and managed to grab it, but as he was pulling it from the shelf, it caught on the white box, bringing it down as well.

"Crap!" he muttered as the white box fell to the floor with a loud *thud*, spilling contents over the floor. "O crap!"

"What was that?" Darius was in the room in seconds. "Ugh, what a mess..."

"Sorry, sorry," Hunter cringed. Oh, he messed up, he messed up...

*He remembered a conversation from a few nights ago when he broke a mug at the Owl House and freaked out. Luz found him trying to hide the evidence.*

*"Hey, hey, it's ok, it's ok, nobody is going to hurt you here for a simple mistake, good? Hunter, nobody will hurt you!"*

*She turned out to be right about Eda and Lilith, as Eda simply rolled her eyes, and Lilith commented how "Every house resident has to break at least one kitchen item, it's the law of cohabitation!"*

Titan, he hoped this applied to Darius' too.

"Hey, are you ok?" Darius asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine...I'm sorry about the box...I...." he crouched down, frantically grabbing items, "If anything is broken, I'll do my best to replace it..."

"Eh, items in that box are irreplaceable," Darius sighed, crouching next to him. "But nothing is fragile, so I'm certain nothing is broken," he quickly added because the boy paled.

"Still..."

"It's fine," Darius' voice didn't allow arguments, "let me just pack those things up, take the box I asked for and go back to the main room and continue whatever you were doing."

"No, it's ok, I can do it," Hunter started to pack the items into the box when he stumbled on a notebook.

A journal, in fact. An old, white, journal with the golden guard symbol on it. He froze, his breath stuck in his throat. His gaze was fixated on the bird, the golden wings, the arch surrounding it. He felt panic rise in his chest.

*Why does Darius have this? Is he secretly working for the emperor? A triple agent.*

Hunter wanted to run, to scream, to just *breathe*, but he couldn't.



"There is a reason I want to put those things back by myself, Little Prince," Darius' slightly exasperated voice pierced through the fog of panic that enveloped his brain.

"Why...why do you have this..." Hunter somehow managed to ask in a shaky voice. He realised he got up to his feet, every muscle in his body strung, ready to bolt if needed. If Darius was working for the emperor after all they were *doomed*.

"It's not what it looks like," Darius said immediately, standing up as well, his hands raised as if he was calming a scared animal, "That is, it's not tied to the emperor if that is what you think. Not anymore at least."

"Anymore...oh!" a realization dawned upon Hunter, and he felt stupid. If Darius really was working for the emperor, this entire operation would've been busted a long time ago. Also, he would not be stupid enough to keep any proof of his treachery in the room where Raine and Eber slept.

Hunter still breathed heavily, looking over the stuff on the floor. They made little sense to him. An old keychain. Two Purple envelopes. A wooden cup. A scarf. Golden scarf. What looked like a string of photos of young Darius and a young man with light brown hair...

"It was his, wasn't it?" Hunter had no idea where the words were coming from, "your mentors?"

"I...yes," Darius gently reached for the notebook and slowly pulled it from Hunter's hands. "That box, It's Justin's stuff."

"I'm sorry I knocked it over. And that I panicked."

"It's all right, nothing's damaged," Darius turned the journal in his hands. "And it's only natural you would panic if you saw this symbol here."

Hunter stared at the symbol in front of him. The way the journal looked was, in a way, a perfect metaphor for how he felt. It was clearly old, it looked as if it had been stored somewhere humid or dirty for a while, with the edges of the pages being brown and grey, but, the strangest was that the fabric-bound cover was at some point sliced through and then carefully stitched back together.

It was certainly done by Darius. *Great going, Hunter, you just knocked over a box with all the memories Darius had of his clearly beloved mentor. You are beyond lucky, nothing in it was breakable.* Still, seeing all of the proof of his predecessor there, stirred up feelings that he didn't want to be there.

"Do you regret it's me and not him here?" Hunter asked suddenly. He didn't mean to ask that out loud. It was supposed to be just a thought, one he would shove down so it could only bother him during those short periods of time after he would wake up and before, inevitably, Luz would too, dragging him with her to have some hot chocolate. Or, since they ran out of the human drink, mulled apple blood.

"Kid..."

"Heh! I'm sorry you're stuck with me, a kid you despise instead of your beloved mentor!" he added, his tone painfully self-deprecating.

Darius rolled his eyes, "I don't...kid, I don't hate you-"

"Oh really?" Hunter felt anger and annoyance bubbling up. If there is one thing he hated, it was being made out to be stupid.

"Yes really? Where did you get that idea from?" Darius huffed, exasperated.

"Gee, I don't know! Maybe it was making fun of me that day I almost recruited Willow, Gus, Skara and Viney? Ignoring my meeting, being dismissive! Insulting my work!" Hunter was progressively raising his voice, straightening up, facing Darius fully, "Or Maybe it was years of ignoring me! Or maybe it was implying I'm worthless next to your beloved mentor! I mean, I get it, I get it that I'm half-a-witch, that I don't have magic and it must be awful to deal with me now! But at least don't lie to me!"

"Hunt-"

"No! Do you know how much I hated Being underestimated? And- and treated Like I'm less than? DO YOU KNOW HOW IT FELT TO KNOW THAT NO MATTER WHAT I DO, I'LL NEVER LIVE UP TO THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE? OR TO ANYONE REALLY SINCE I'M A MAGICLESS WITCH?" He was shouting by now, because shouting was better than crying, even as tears pricked in the corners of his eyes.

"I tried, I really *tried*! And then, you made fun of me for that! First, you told me to get the recruits, then you got all snide and passive-aggressive about it? And once I let them go, then you got all happy and, what, proud? Which, ok, it was a good thing I did, but I was *so confused*! And ever since you act like you liked me and like none of that stuff before ever happened! I DON'T GET YOU!"

Hunter jutted his chin, taking one step towards Darius, and then he realised Darius was pissed.

His survival instincts kicked in immediately. He wanted to curl up on himself, to appear smaller. Maybe then Darius would be less angry, maybe he wouldn't hit- "I'm sorry I..." Hunter took a step back, trying to calm his breathing.

At the back of his mind, he remembered his interactions with Eda, when she told him it was ok if he was angry about making fun of his voice. And even Lilith, who told him it was ok if he was angry at her for calling him a brat (which, granted, he kind of was).

If that was ok, being salty about a single mean comment and about being, somewhat justified, called a brat, maybe....this was ok too?

"...I don't have to apologise, do I?" He blinked and stopped retreating, his breathing growing calmer, "I shouldn't apologise..." He still trembled like a leaf, but stayed firmly in place, holding on to the Clawthorne sisters' words like a lifeline.

*Eda, Lilith and Luz' would help if Darius tried to hurt him, right? Maybe even Raine?*

*Oh, you want their protection now....pathetic...*

*Well, Darius wouldn't hurt him anyways, right? He never did so before...*

*He helped him after the whole Emerald Entrails debacle, he helped Hunter since he didn't get too mad when Hunter messed up the previous week, he was teaching him how to sew...*

*Maybe he was right, maybe Hunter was delusional thinking Darius disliked him...*

*But he messed up and yelled at him...*

*No, he didn't do anything wrong, he stood up for himself...*

*But he was mean, he shouldn't have yelled at the witch who actually showed him some kindness... he really messed up...*

"You're right, Li-Hunter," Darius sighed, snapping Hunter out of his spiralling thoughts, "you don't have to apologise. Not for speaking the truth."

The witch let out a long sigh and sat down on his bed. There was a strange sadness to him, he looked tired, and regretful, very unlike the witch Hunter knew. Darius patted the place next to him and Hunter, sat down, placing Luz's jacket on his lap, still slightly on guard.

"I owe *you* an apology, kid if anything."

Hunter blinked in surprise, "But...I thought...you looked furious!"

Darius dragged his hand over his face, sighing, "Yes, at *myself*! You're right...I...we, all the coven heads...we haven't been treating you fairly. You're a kid after all and-"

"I'm not a kid!"

"I don't mean this condescendingly," Darius calmed him down, "Not this time. I'm sorry I ever did. But you are a kid and I shouldn't have..." he sighed, "I should have never treated you like you are responsible for more than you are."

Hunter shrugged, "It was...just that way in the Coven, wasn't it? It was normal. I probably shouldn't hold it against you. Not that much."

"Perhaps. But it shouldn't have been normal. As you said, things I've said, like that day I sent you to find recruits...I knew it was wrong..."

"Then why'd you say them?" Hunter muttered, kicking his feet.

"What?"

"I asked, *then why do it*?" Hunter snapped his face at him, scowling, "If you know something is wrong and if it's not a *lesser of two evils* situation or something, why do it?"

"I...could give you a hundred excuses and it would still not make things right-"

"Ugh! I don't want some...platitudes!" Hunter was on his feet again, pacing furiously, "Can't you give me an explanation? Did you dislike me that much? Were you scared of...of him? Or of that, the rebellion would be discovered or...or...why?"

"It all played a part but, most of all," Darius chuckled self-deprecatingly, and it was really strange to see it from him, "It's I'm a sad, bitter man who didn't want to get attached. Not again."

"Oh...so it's related to your mentor, right? Heh, of course, it is!" Hunter plopped back on the bed, frustrated.

"Yes, it is. And," he smiles softly, "I suppose that after everything the least I owe you is an explanation. It's a long story," he sighed, "But you deserve to hear it and what I was doing can wait."

Hunter crossed his legs on the bed, which got a soft glare from Darius but when he realised that the boy was in his socks, he nodded, even smiling slightly at the sight of Hunter's rather dorky socks (these had frogs on them).

He felt a familiar weight on his shoulder suddenly. It was Flapjack, and the bird was eying Darius carefully. Hunter took him in his hands and placed him in his lap.

"It's ok, buddy," he whispered, "We're just talking."

*Didn't sound like just talking, but whatever you say,* Flapjack chirped, his eyes still on Darius.

Darius barely seemed to notice any of this, this, staring at the notebook in his hands as if he couldn't believe it was actually there as if it was going to disappear.

"After my mentor...was gone, I wasn't in a good state. Right before he died, he started pulling away, closing himself off. We were close, like brothers, you could say. However, due to his position, sometimes he would disappear for a few weeks, you know how busy he was better than I do," Darius said and Hunter nodded.

Darius continued, "So I just assumed he simply had more responsibilities again, sure he was my mentor but I was a witch in my own right by then, a few years older than you are. And I was already in the abomination coven, so I didn't *need* a mentor. It was purely his goodwill that he kept mentoring me, but we spent less time together than when I was in school. I considered joining the emperor's coven, if nothing else, then working with him. Lilith did, why shouldn't I be able to? It was much different back then; do you know that?"

"What was?"

"Recruiting. Try-outs. One or two, maybe three witches from each town per season would even start the basic training, let alone finish it. I'm digressing," he shook his head, his gaze distant, "I barely saw him for weeks, but we managed to keep contact through crows. He always seemed on edge, and tired, and then, one night, he was just...gone."

He took a moment to collect himself before he kept talking, his voice flat, "Supposedly, had a mission, a village was being pestered by a particularly nasty swarm of rat worms but that should've been nothing for him. It was the official story, that the wild witches angered the rat worms, he went to stop them, got injured and died. I know that accidents are possible but," he shook his head, "I knew in my gut something was off. He was too skilled to be taken down by ratworms and a few wild witches. When I tell you that he had a few run-ins with Eda and even she barely Got a scratch on him, that tells you something."

Hunter nodded. The first time he faced Eda he had to resort to rather...underhanded methods to get her to cooperate because he knew that, even depowered, Eda was a dangerous opponent. Someone who managed to fight her in her prime and go unscathed must've been an amazing combatant.

He also suddenly had a nagging feeling that he should speak to King, but he put a pin in that thought, focusing on Darius' tale.

"Even the funeral barely happened, I had to sneak in to attend. I got a decent hang of my abomination teleportation by then, so I hid in the corner of the castle room, just so I could pay my respects. You know what the tradition for burial in the coven is?"

"Of course, I *led* it," Hunter scoffed, then cringed immediately, "Sorry. That was insensitive. A simple coffin, opened, carried either from the childhood home of the deceased or, more commonly, from the castle and landed into the river that will carry it to the boiling sea. It's only closed if the family insists, but even if the body is damaged, open is encouraged because those scouts who stay alive must be aware of the danger."

"Exactly. So, why would the coffin of a man who had no living family left be closed? He once said I was the closest thing he had to a brother, but it was a private conversation, and I certainly didn't request it. I knew he didn't. After that, he was barely spoken off, only mentioned in passing. The Golden Guard position was empty, another witch took the position of the coven head before Lilith, then she ended up leading it, and that was it. It was like I was the only one left to remember him. Eventually, I made myself believe I was imagining things. It was easier to numb myself to it. I closed off from other people in my life, buried myself in work, and progressed in the coven remarkably fast. It was just a closed coffin. It was just a weird accident."

"One day, on the anniversary of his death, I....well, Let's just say that I had more than one bottle of apple blood and mudberry wine. Something brought those memories back, whether it was the drink, or just my thoughts playing a cruel trick, I don't know. I ended up at the spot where he and I would hang out, and it was empty, and I started wracking things and then...this thing fell from the floorboards," he smacked the journal in his lap.

"The journal was hidden?"

"Yup."

"Is your rampage the reason the cover is..."

"Yup!"

Hunter chuckled, "I'm sorry, it's not funny I just...imagined that it was damaged in a fight or something and..."

"It was just me failing at what people call *self-control*," Darius rolled his eyes, letting out yet another self-deprecating chuckle, "I knew immediately that he never wanted it found. Well, not by anyone but me, perhaps. It was hidden in our hangout."

"However, when I sobered up...I once again decided to ignore it. *It's just a journal*, I said. Nothing more, nothing less. Thing is...I wasn't rational, I couldn't...didn't want to deal with that pain again. I didn't even open it for months because I was a coward. Afraid of what I'll find in there or what kind of a mess I would end up being after I read it. Until one day something clicked in me and I finally decided to start going through those notes. Granted, that was easier said than done, since I slashed the notebook in half and had to fix it first. It was hell, looking through his handwriting, his drawings-he was an *excellent* artist-and it took me days because forcing myself to read it...this lasted until I found a letter addressed to me, safely hidden in the paper pocket on the back cover."

"Oh."

"Yes. He told me that he found out. It was, well, everything we know. That Belos was up to no good and that he had to be stopped. That everything we believed about wild magic was a lie. Anything more than that, he wrote, was in the pages of his journal. He also told me of his plan. He caused a prison break-in, I always thought those wild witches escaped on their own, and he led the prisoners as far as he could, away from the castle, away from the Isles themselves. He planned on confronting Belos if he had to, and, if he survived, maybe contacting me. He also told me he kept this all a secret to protect me, but he would explain everything once we reunited. However...." Darius's voice wavered and he stifled a sob.

"He was caught," Hunter finished.

"Yes. He even started the letter with the cliched '*if you're reading this, I'm dead!*'" Darius chuckled bitterly, only a bit of nostalgia seeping into his voice, "and then acknowledged it was a cliché in his

own goodbye letter, that bastard. Asked me to forgive him and to be careful, but not to believe in what was taught. And, instead of following through with his mission immediately, I got angry. Angry at *him*, can you imagine? Apparently being angry with the wrong people is a pattern for me! I cursed him, why would he go fight an emperor, why would he stir things up knowing what might happen, leaving me behind? I had the *audacity* to blame him, but then, finally, realised he was right. All his findings are in Here, it isn't much, but it's what started this whole thing. At least on my side."

"I'm sorry. For your loss," Hunter said.

"It's long past, but thank you." Darius nodded, "For years I barely kept friends. Eber, of all people, somehow got through to me but even then it took me years to admit we were friends. And, I was... amicable...with Raine, but we only reconnected recently. And then, years after Justin's death, I saw you in that castle...they say that the time between him and you was the longest period of there not being a Guard. And then you came. A scrawny thirteen-year-old who was training to fill a role much too big for him," Darius said sadly.

"Hey!" Hunter huffed indignantly.

"That's true. And that's not resentment talking, you were, are, young for that role. And I wasn't much help, was I?"

"It's understandable," Hunter said simply, "I get now why you looked so sad in the memory of my initiation as the Golden Guard. I replaced someone you loved and of course, you were angry."

Darius shook his head and firmly said, "It may be understandable, but it still wasn't right. I was angry, I was, but I should've directed that anger where it belonged. At Belos'. Not at you."

"You didn't like that I followed his every move, bought into everything he said did you?"

"No, no, I didn't. It felt like a slap in the face. But, again, it was me projecting my sadness on you. I never hated you, I resented myself and projected that on you. Because it was easier. I forgot that he was also a follower once like you were. Titan, I was! I closed my eyes to the truth that was *literally spelt out for me!* Even once I knew *something* was off because it was easier than admitting I was wrong. And I expected you to see through the lies? How were you supposed to do that? He was the only family you knew. And even if I knew what he was like I...Titan..." he closed his eyes and clutched the fabric of his trousers, regret written in every line on his face.

"You never hurt me," Hunter tried reassuring him, even if it was, to a degree, a lie. But, he liked Darius and he didn't like seeing him like this, "You were nicer than the others. And you never hurt me."

Darius let out a short, joyless laugh, "Oh, we both know that is a lie! I did hurt you, you just shouted about it at me, which, by the way, you had every right to. And even if I didn't, I wasn't nice. I know that. Don't try to sugarcoat it to make me feel better, little prince," he faced Hunter, "Maybe I started treating you decently in the end but I should've treated you like your own person since the moment I met you."

"You just wanted me to prove myself!" Hunter insisted.

"Prove what? That you understood something I myself denied for almost a decade? I should've never put you in a position where you should *prove yourself*. To anyone, least of all me. I was angry at everything, Justin, Belos, at myself for not seeing things clearly, for refusing to see them clearly, when I had to and I took it all put on you, because I saw the same in you. It was an easy

way out, and *I'm sorry*. I knew your life was hell, and what did I do about it? Made it worse! At best, I ignored it and that can do just as much damage. It doesn't matter how much pain I was in, or if I missed a man who died 20 years ago, I was the bloody adult. You didn't deserve any of it, little Prince. I'm sorry."

He looked him in the eyes, and Hunter saw genuine sorrow and apology there, "I'm not asking forgiveness, my words don't make it right, I can't fix it, even if I'd now gladly go to find that arrogant man I was, probably still am, and slap him across the face, but I can't. I do hope I can try to make it up to you, to do better, from now on."

"Why?" Hunter asked weakly.

"It's the right thing to do," Darius simply said and, was he imagining it, or did Hunter seem a bit disappointed?

*Stop being an emotional recluse and tell him the true reason, you stubborn idiot!* Said a voice in his head that sounded suspiciously like Edalyn.

Well, maybe his mental Eda was right. This whole mess started because he was *avoiding* things.

*He needs it*, he thought, and, for a moment, that sounded like Justin.

Titan, was it the lack of sleep mixed with grief, or was he going crazy, hearing voices in his head?

"Darius?"

"And, well, I told you I didn't want to get attached. Mission failed," he chuckled, "I care for you. I want to be there, if you-oof."

Hunter hugged him, tightly, which took him off guard. It was not a very common gesture on the isles, least of all between highly positioned coven members. Hunter seemed surprised himself, as he stiffened and blushed to his ears, but kept his arms around Darius' middle, as he muttered, "You already are here," there was a small sniff in his voice.

Darius, somewhat awkwardly, hugged him back and patted him on the back for good measure.

Titan, he was bad at this.

"You kept Flapjack safe," Hunter said, as he let go, and took the bird into his hands again, "And my friends and you gave my scroll so I could keep in touch!"

"Those are small things, compared to everything," Darius waved the praise away.

"Are they? Flapjack means the world to me," Hunter smiled at the palisman and he chirped back, "You could've betrayed me. Tell Belos. To prove your loyalty, get the suspicion of you. But you didn't."

Darius was mildly concerned that *that* is where Hunter's thought process went, "And what good would that do?" He asked.

"I don't know, make sure your mission goes well?"

"I was not about to sacrifice you or the bird," Darius looked between them and offered a small smile to the palisman who still eyed him somewhat suspiciously.

"Oh really? Mr *so what if a few small people die!*"

"Oh, shut up," Darius rolled his eyes fondly. "You have been spending too much time with Eda! Also, there is a difference. The rebellion was not in danger of being uncovered. And, as I said, I started to care for you. Quite quickly, I might add."

"Even then, If Belos found out you covered for me, you'd be in trouble and...and...you later taught me how to sew! And, um, got me the stuff from the castle and you were there when I foolishly went to Hexside and...there is probably more!"

Darius smiled. Ok, if those things meant so much to Hunter, maybe he wasn't *that* bad at this, "You're welcome."

For a few moments, they just sat, not relaxed enough to call it comfortable silence, but not awkward enough to say it wasn't.

"Why did he keep the symbol?" Hunter broke the silence.

"What?"

"Your mentor, why keep the Golden Guard symbol on his rebel journal?"

Darius smiled, sadness and pride mixed on his face, "Well, he wanted to reclaim it."

"Why?"

"He found evidence that he was not the first Golden Guard to rebel, he never said *what* this evidence was, but I believe him. So, he thought, if multiple of you rebelled, why not make that symbol one of rebellion? Take the power it holds, giving it a different kind of power."

"Oh...that's why...?"

"I got so pissed when I saw you wearing it and told you you can wear it proudly when you showed some rebellion? Yes, though," Darius scratched his neck, and it was so strange to see the usually prideful and confident witch so flustered, "I should've probably explained myself better."

Hunter scoffed, "And what? Come to me, still working for Belos like *Hey kid, it's cool to wear that sigil now? By the way, I'm saying that because I'm totally a rebel and so was my predecessor who wanted to make it the symbol of rebellion!* I'd have you arrested! Oh, crap, sorry!" he cringed, but Darius only laughed.

"No hard feelings," he ruffled the boy's hair, "Look, you probably have mixed feelings about the idea, but the sentiment stays. You can be proud, Hunter."

The boy shrugged, "I haven't done much..."

"Really? You managed to accept the truth, much faster than I, or even Justin, mind you, helped us by giving everyone vital information, helped your friends, helped your friends some more, assisted in leading a school rebellion," Darius counted on his fingers, "gave the entire school body the vital information about the situation with Belos, and there is probably more than I'm missing. For titan's sake, you're literally holding a jacked you were repairing for Luz at this moment while you're in the middle of a rebel base helping with the rebellion! What more should you do?"

Hunter blushed at the praise, and his eyes tingled again, "Oh, well..."

"Justin would be proud. Oh, and I should make one more thing clear, I said he was a great witch, and you are too."



"I don't have magic," Hunter looked away, more to hide the overwhelmed tears than anything.

"Magic doesn't make a witch," Darius shrugged, then cringed, "And titan, I should've never implied otherwise...look, how about I spell out a giant *I'm sorry* above my head in abomination for a week? A coward's way out, but it might cover everything."

Hunter chuckled, "I thought you lacked a sense of humour."

"I'd do it," Darius said, his tone entirely serious, which only made Hunter laugh more "Not that it would make up for anything but still..."

Hunter still snickered, "Well, you would be exposing yourself to merciless teasing from Eda, Raine *and* Eber, possibly others, so I think it would help!"

Darius chuckled, "Titan, you really are spending too much time with Eda...what I was saying, you...you are great, kid." His eloquence was suddenly lost, his throat choked up a bit. "A great witch. A great person."

"Thanks," Hunter felt his heart swell with pride.

*A galderstone heart.*

Because, he was *not*, in fact, a witch.

And neither was Justin.

Sometimes he wondered if they were truly persons.

Flapjack flew up from his palms to nuzzle against his neck comfortingly and he hoped Darius didn't notice his sudden disposition.

But then, suddenly he got an overwhelming urge to tell his deepest, grimmest, (ha-ha, Eda would laugh), secret to Darius. He needed to tell *someone*, and, well if Darius thought he was disgusting, it would hurt, but he could live with it. Also, Darius probably deserved to know about Justin.

But another part of Hunter didn't want to deal with that *at that moment*. Or at all, really. What if Darius hated him? What if it all caused a fight? What if, what if...

No, he couldn't. Not yet.

*But Darius deserved to know...*

Maybe just...

"I saw the fate of previous Golden Guards," Hunter said, the genial mood suddenly shattered

"What?" Darius snapped his head towards him, going from a somewhat melancholic smile, to shocked horror in a second.

"When I was with Luz, in Belos' mind," Hunter continued, his gaze fixated on a small tear in the carpet, "they...there were...about a dozen," *don't mention the grimwalker thing, don't mention the grimwalker thing*, "and they...I think he was right, Justin. Every one of us rebelled, Belos said as much," by that moment, he was shaking.

*It hurts every time he chooses to betray me.*

“Hunter...”

“I saw him too,” Hunter sniffed, “well, who I think was him. Your mentor. The last one in a row he...he was petrified. Or maybe it was the one on the left. He was blasted to pieces.”

Darius stared at him, wide-eyed.

*Oh crap why did he say that? Who would want to know that their loved one met a horrible death like that!*

Darius stared at him, his expression unreadable.

“Sorry I...”

The next moment he was pulled into a hug, tighter than before, almost protective.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry you had to see that,” Darius said, his voice shuddering.

“It’s ok, that’s not your fault,” Hunter pulled away from the hug a bit. Darius opened his mouth to say something, “Nope! I had that argument with Raine, not having it again. You couldn’t have known I’d end up there.”

Darius broke the hug and scooted up on bed, resting his back against the wall. He looked like he would fall were it not for the support, “Still, you shouldn’t have witnessed it. But...thank you,” he smiled, though the expression was so unbelievably sad, “I...Titan...20 years to learn that...”

“I’m sorry for the bad news,” Hunter said lamely, “I just...had a feeling you’d want to know. I guess...I don’t...you should know, I think.”

“It’s not exactly *news* that he is gone. And you’re right, I did want to know. In fact, it’s been troubling me for years. Two decades, to be exact. Petrified...titan...” he clasped a hand over his mouth.

He spoke to Eda, and, between their dark jokes about how she and Raine almost took Eber and Raine down with them, Eda off-handedly mentioned how *‘going down via messed up magic still hurt way less than being petrified, actually, probably worse than anything!’* And, considering that Eda went through a lot, he took her word for it.

“I wish it was different,” Hunter said.

“Me too. I wish you could both somehow be here. He would’ve like you; you know? And probably smack me over the head for the type of idiot I’ve been. But, really, thank you.”

“I just gave you the worst news you could’ve gotten,” Hunter scooted closer to him.

“No. I knew he was gone, but I...it’s a horrible way to end but, at least now I know what happened,” he sighed, “trust me, I imagined worse. Its closure. I’m sorry ended up being the one to tell me, you should have never been in that position. But I’m beyond grateful you did. If I didn’t before, I’d owe you for life for this.”

“No, you don’t owe me I,” Hunter looked at Flapjack, thought of Luz, Gus and Willow, “if something happened to someone I cared for, or loved,” he smiled at the bird in his hands, “I think I’d want to know too.”

*Nothing will happen, Flapjack chirped, will fight. Will win. Will be good.*

“You’re always so optimistic, Flap,” Hunter scratched the bird’s head, “I hope you’re right.”

“We’ll make it so he’s right,” Darius said. Flapjack looked at him, flew up and then pecked his forehead.

“Ow! I work hard to keep that skin intact, bird!” he said, which was clearly a wrong thing to say because the bird, on his way back to Hunter’s shoulder, pecked him on the nose as well. “Ow!”

When he was perched on Hunter’s shoulder, the bird continued giving him a glare. Hunter chuckled, “That was a warning. If, oh Flap, that’s cute! Um, if you, quote *act like an idiot and a jerk to my person again, there will be no moisturizer to help your skin*. I’d take that threat seriously.”

“I am,” Darius grumbled a bit as he rubbed his nose but smiled. He looked at the palisman, “I promise, I won’t *act like an idiot and a jerk again*. That I, in fact, a rather generous way of describing me.

Flapjack chirped again, “He does thank you for keeping him a secret from Belos,” Hunter translated.

“You’re welcome,” Darius said and reached out, scratching the bird on the head lightly when he was certain he wouldn’t be hurt. The bird pecked him again, but it was much gentler than before, almost friendly.

“Darius?”

“Hm?”

“Is it...I’m still...titan, why is this so hard,” he sighed, “I’m still a bit hurt...ok? I mean I meant everything I said good and bad, I’m not taking it back. I...I’m still a bit salty,” he used Eda’s phrasing from before, it was easier than coming up with his own words.

“That’s ok.”

“I know,” Hunter, trying to keep his voice firm. Truth was, it was still hard to say it, or even think it. And he was more than a little overwhelmed by the emotional rollercoaster of a talk they just had.

“Now, maybe it’s enough of hard topics for tonight, huh, Little Prince? Is the nickname, ok? I know I heard the bird tube making a fuss at one point...”

“It’s fine. And Hooty wanted to call me *ex-GG*...”

“Why?” Darius looked straight-up disgusted.

“There was a weirdly cute sentiment behind it. Yours is fine, well, now it is.”

“Glad to hear it. Anyways, as I was saying, enough of hard topics? Unless there is something else you want to talk about.”

Was Darius suspecting something? Even if he did, he was letting Hunter decide. And Hunter knew that any more of this would overwhelm him too much so he shook his head, “No, I mean...maybe, but...another time.”

“Ok, now, about that jacket,” Darius gingerly reached over to him.

Hunter felt his face flush as he took the jacket from his lap and studied the tear on Luz's shoulder, "I thought I was improving but...look,"

Darius took the jacket and studied Hunter's work, "Hm, this is--"

"Impressively bad?" Hunter asked, half-teasingly, though, if he was honest, he was terrified Darius might actually say it.

"Oh, my titan..." Darius facepalmed, his features turning regretful again.

*Too soon, Hunter*, the boy said to himself, "No! No! I'm teasing!"

"I know but, I shouldn't have..." Darius sighed, "Ok, here," he waved his hand and his bun reshaped, actually taking the form of the words *I'm sorry*. Hunter burst into laughter, clutching his stomach, practically rolling. He didn't suspect for a moment that Darius was serious when he suggested it.

"Call me lazy, but just imagine I'm saying it every time we remember another awful thing I did, otherwise we won't be able to have a normal conversation."

"It's ok, you don't have to apologize for *everything*," Hunter smiled, still shaking from laughter a bit.

Suddenly, the door opened, and Eber walked in and jumped on the bed, flicking the *I'm sorry* above Darius' head.

*Should keep it. Good look for you.* He teased.

"How long have you been eavesdropping?" Darius asked.

*Not eavesdropped, just listened.* Eber purred into Darius' face.

Darius shoved him away, "Uh-huh, that is the definition of eavesdropping!"

Eber turned more serious for a moment, cocking his head to the side, *Heard about Justin, I'm sorry, old friend.* He nuzzled against Darius's side, *and I'm sorry too, cub.* he turned to Hunter.

"It's ok," Hunter said, "I mean, it's not...wasn't, seeing them but...I'll be fine."

*Not just what you saw. About past too.* The smaller witch put a hand on Hunter's knee and looked him in the eyes sadly, *Made mistakes too. Feel free to yell too.*

"I...you probably overheard and...I had enough of yelling for one night. But thanks."

*You're welcome.* Eber hugged him gingerly. It was surprisingly comforting. As they let go, they climbed on Darius' back which Darius didn't seem to mind.

"Ok, now, back to Hunter's project, what actually wanted to say is that this," Darius pointed at the jacket in his hands, "Is actually not that bad."

"That biggest tear, it won't hold," Hunter frowned.

"Yes, the fabric is too damaged for regular stitching. You need to *darn it*!"

Hunter gaped at him blankly, "I need to do what?"

“Essentially use the thread to weave new fabric, it’s not hard. I’ll show it to you,” he reached with his abomination on the shelf and carried over a box.

“What about that review you were doing?” Hunter asked.”

“Eh, it can wait, I’ll do it at night.”

*What happened to always having perfect eight-hour beauty sleep.* Eber teased.

“Yeah, if you continue like this, you’ll look like me!” Hunter joined in.

“Tease all you want, but *never*,” Darius chuckled, “I’ll get back to my schedule as soon as possible. And I’ll figure out a way to get you a decent one too!”

Hunter scoffed at first but then smiled, “That...actually sounds nice.”

“Well of course it does,” Darius ruffled his hair, “Now, we’ll darn this and then add some patches for extra reinforcement,” Darius said. “Eber, if we need more time, you’ll be on *distracting the human-* “

“*Luz!*” Hunter insisted.

“Sorry, *distracting Luz*, duty.”

“Just ask her to teach you glyphs,” Hunter suggested, “She and I can talk about them for *hours*.”

*Could be useful skill.* Eber said, *But first, a nap!* They curled and landed their head in Darius’ lap.

Darius took a needle and a thread and started showing Hunter the darning process. Once Hunter took over and got into a decent rhythm, Darius relaxed, took a book, and stayed with him, while petting Eber on the head.

“Hey, Hunter!” they suddenly heard Luz and Hunter quickly shoved the jacked away and grabbed the first thing he could. It was a random piece of cloth.

“Oh, sewing lessons?”

“Um, yes!”

“Cool, so, lunch is ready, so you guys can come to eat, or you can eat here, whatever,” Luz said, “However, after lunch Kayta and I are going for a spin with Owlbert and Viven! Do you and Flapjack wanna join?”

“Um, no! I think that Flapjack is tired,” Hunter said, and the bird helpfully pretended to yawn. “I’ll stick to sewing lessons for today. Spare the energy.”

“Come on,” Darius gestured, “Eber, wake up, Lunch is ready. Hunter, you’ll keep sewing later. Let’s go to the kitchen because I draw the line at eating in the bed!”

*Spoilsport!*

“Slob!”

.....

They had lunch, tasty stew and crackers and then retreated to Darius’ room. Hunter asked if Darius

had to get back to his work, but Darius insisted he would do the work later.

“You could still use help, and I want to finish that book!”

*Read that book five times already. Going soft.*

“Fine, I’m staying to spend time with you Little Prince, since we still have some.”

Hunter tried and failed to hide his flushed face and then pulled Darius into another hug. Darius was infinitely less awkward this time, wrapping his arms around him and ruffling his hair.

“Thanks,” Hunter muttered and, as he pulled away tried to overtly wipe away a few errant tears.

“No problem. Eber, will you join?”

*Yup. Nap always good after lunch.*

“Hey, Hunter,” Luz called after him as he followed Darius and Eber back into their room, “You sure you don’t wanna join us?”

“Um, no, I’ll let Flap rest!”

“Ok, we won’t be far so, if you change your mind and he rests, feel free to come,” she rushed off.

“Come on, girl, let the dude be!” Katya pulled Luz after her.

The four of them took the same spots on the bed as before, Darius sitting with his back to the wall, Eber splayed over his lap. Hunter sat next to them, sewing the pads back on the jacket and Flapjack nestled in his hair. He was rambling about a book he loved, the one that King, of all people, wrote. Darius didn’t even pretend to read his book, opting for listening to the boy instead.

“...that scene was amazing! I mean the way he helped and-OW!” he checked his finger and, since there was no blood, he kept sewing.

Darius chuckled, “That is the third time in ten minutes! Slow down or your fingers will look like a pincushion!”

“Ok, ok, I’ll be careful! As I was saying, he helped and then the next thing-OW!”

*“Hunter!”*

“I’ll be fine, it’s just a needle!”

“I know, but I don’t think Luz will appreciate blood stains on her jacket,” Darius pointed at it with his chin.

“Oh, right, crap!” Hunter let go of his sewing project and took a band-aid that Darius handed him (they were purple. Was everything Darius owned purple?)

“Now, calm down, slow down and pay attention to what you are doing!” Darius instructed.

“Ok, ok, but I gotta tell you about this part!”

“You’ll recap the whole book!”

“You said you don’t mind the spoilers!”

“Fine, I’ll listen just finish the jacket first. Luz will probably finish that race or whatever and she’ll probably want it back. We can’t stall her forever!”

“Stall her? The flight practice was her idea!”

*He told Katya to stall. They stay out long, you finish sewing, Eber suddenly muttered.*

Darius lightly smacked them “You were supposed to be asleep, mutt!”

Eber snickered, *Sleeptalking*.

“Uh-huh!”

“Wait? You really did that?” Hunter beamed.

“Yes really. Now, finish that or my and Katya’s efforts will be for nothing. Sew!”

“Ok, ok, I’m sewing!”

He finished the jacket, the job wasn’t perfect but he was happy with the result. And Darius seemed slightly impressed too.

After that, he kept talking about the book. He wanted to join flying practice but he was too comfortable like this. Besides, there would be time for everything else after they defeat Belos. All the time in the world...

“Ok, ok I am...” it was barely a minute before hunter was rambling again.

## Chapter End Notes

The number of times I rewrote this, added things, removed things etc is insane. Still not entirely sure if I’m entirely happy with it but here it is.

It ended up being kind of a 2-for-one with Eber joining at the last minute, but, eh, I wanted Eber here, so Eber is here.

Darning is an actual sewing practice. And it takes TIME! But it really can fix even big tears.

Please, leave kudos and comment if you liked it. Comments make my day and I enjoy reading them! Thank you for reading and, for my long-time readers, for dealing with my messy posting schedule.

Also, if anyone wants to ramble with me about TOH, you can find me on tumblr as @therivergirl.

## Plus one: King

### Chapter Summary

mushroom\_bois was completely right, there was some foreshadowing for this chapter in the previous one.

Luz's two brothers get some bonding time.

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was the early evening when Hunter finished the jacket, but Luz and the bards were still practising glyphs outside. So, Hunter wrapped the jacket in some old newspaper, tied it with a vine he created with a plant glyph and put the pack on Luz's bed. It looked decent, he hoped. Flapjack chirped supportively on his shoulder. He hoped his palisman wasn't being supportive just for the sake of it.

He was pondering whether he should leave a note with his name or not when he heard the sound of small feet behind him. He turned around, facing King. His realization from earlier in the day hit him, guilt settling in his stomach.

He half expected King to make him leave the room. For days now, King has been, not exactly hostile but not friendly either. He wasn't tense, not like Lilith was before they started talking things out, but he seemed cautious. And he was a bit...jaundiced, over Hunter's general presence.

At first, Hunter thought it was just the way the Owl House worked, but then he realized it went a bit beyond it.

.....

*A few days into his stay at the Owl House, he walked into the living room, only to find Luz and Eda on the sofa watching the crystal ball.*

*Just as Hunter wanted to sit next to Luz', King jumped out of nowhere, planting himself there.*

*"King! Move so Hunter can sit!" Luz warned him.*

*"Nope! My spot!"*

*"You can sit on my lap," Luz offered, "get some nice pets."*

*"Nope! You can scratch me Here too!"*

*"Ok, Let's take a different approach," Eda, who sat next to Luz, stretched over her so she could reach King. She tried removing him, but he embedded his claws into the sofa like a stubborn car and wouldn't budge.*

*"It's ok!" Hunter argued, "I can sit on the floor!" He said and did so.*



*"King, would you move so Hunter could-"*

*"Nope! HE Said he could sit on the floor, so, let him be on the floor!"*

.....

*The next day, Hunter was in the kitchen and King grabbed the last muffin, staring him right in the eyes. One time, he hogged the bathroom for so long Hunter seriously pondered teleporting to Gus' place just so he could pee.*

It was never something that would make Hunter feel truly unwelcome, but it was...annoying. King laid off a bit since he found out he was a Titan and they all arrived

It finally dawned upon Hunter why King acted like that. And he felt like an idiot for not realising sooner. He talked things out with Luz', Eda, and even Amity Blight while they were in school.

King...not so much. It just escaped him that he should talk to the kid specifically.

He couldn't believe his own idiocy. For days he was carefully leaving the room if he would wake up, not to wake King up, because he *didn't want to wake up an eight-year-old*, but apparently, it didn't occur to him that he should apologise to the same eight-year-old for keeping him as a hostage.

Did he truly ever intend on hurting Kong that day? No, not for real. He knew that Eda and Luz would cave.

But what if they didn't...

Would he *actually* hurt King or take him away?

That was not a question Hunter liked to ponder. He was scared he would turn out to be crueller than he liked to believe he was.

But that wasn't all, was it? King was there at the Eclipse Lake and Hunter fought him. And he wasn't exactly careful not to hurt him. He didn't hold punches that day, no false threats, or tricks. He put King and everyone else in real danger.

Yup, he made a mess for himself, and he had to apologize his way out of it.

"Oh, it's you," King huffed, "I thought I saw someone in the room. What are you doing?"

"Um, leaving the gift for Luz," Hunter stated the obvious.

King eyed the packet, jumped on the bed, and poked it, "Soft. Where did you manage to get her a gift?"

"Um...I didn't *get* anything," Hunter twiddled his thumbs, averting his gaze, "I made something, well, even made is a strong word, I...I fixed her jacket," he said awkwardly. Now that he said it, it almost sounded silly.

*Sorry I threatened you and your friends. And thanks for hiding me from my crazy, tyrannical uncle despite us being enemies and me being a jackass. Here, I patched up your jacket as a thank you!*

He could feel Flapjack's eyes on him as he always did when he was self-deprecating.

"Eda's old varsity?" King asked.

"Yeah...wait, Eda's?" Hunter asked, surprised.

"Yes, why else did you think there was an E on that jacket? It was Eda's back in her Hexside days. A Grudgby uniform," King sat down turning the package in his hands, "Did you use glyph magic for this?"

"I...never considered that," Hunter blinked. No wonder Luz was so attached to it, "And yes, I used a plant glyph. Do you think she'll like it?"

King shrugged, "I mean, Luz likes anything glyph related. As for the jacket, I don't know. Did you do a good job, or did you butcher it?"

"I...Darius said it's ok," Hunter scratched his neck and sat down as well.

"Then I guess she'll like it fine. Now, do you need anything?"

"No, I just wanted to leave it for her. If you wanted to nap or something, I can leave."

"I can nap wherever," King said, "And this is your room too," He pointed to the top bunk, "so, I can't exactly kick you out. Something is on your mind, isn't it? You have that pensive expression you sometimes get."

Hunter decided to bite the crossbow bolt and just admit what was on his mind, "It occurred to me I never apologized to you. Been thinking about it the whole day," Hunter said. King snapped his head to the boy, "about that day with the Selkidomus. I...caging you, putting you in danger like that, using you as a hostage, it was wrong. I know it was probably scary and... And...I'm sorry. I truly am. I get it if you...don't like me around."

If he was full honest, as much as Flapjack was emotional support, the bird being there made the apology harder at the same time. He didn't like mentioning certain part of his past in front of him. Sure, Flapjack knew about them, but, he was always a bit scared that THAT may be the very moment he decided to leave Hunter because he realized how bad some things were.

Naturally, Hunter had nothing to worry about because Flapjack just pecked his ear gently, and nuzzled against his neck.

King sighed, "I know. It wasn't really about that, not about me. I mean, it's scary when I think about it, though I slept through half of it. But, you threatened Eda, and Luz. My...mum and sister. I mean, *I* was fine. But they almost weren't. You used me against them! And then at the Eclipse Lake..."

Hunter nodded, "I did it again. I threatened Luz' and hurt Amity and fought you too. I'm sorry."

"I know. I...just...there is still a part of me that is scared that you might do something bad, you know."

Hunter flinched. Because, as much as he knew he wouldn't, he would never go back to Belos...

He would lie if he said that there wasn't at least a tiny part of him that found the concept appealing.

"I...understand," Hunter said, despite the lump in his chest, "I did that at Eclipse Lake. Broke your trust."

King shrugged, "To be fair, we weren't actually allies then. We just happened to both dislike Kikimora more and had kinda the same goal."

Hunter chuckled, "That says a lot about Kikimora."

"I know you're with us' now," King Said, "I mean, you'd be crazy to go back. But if you wanted to, you had your chances. And you didn't, you did the opposite. You're literally sharing the secrets only you know about with the rebellion. I don't know why I'm scared still. Sorry if I was acting like a jerk the last few days."

Hunter smiled, "That's ok. I get it. Trust has to be earned. I hope I can earn yours once. And again, I'm truly sorry about everything. I know...I know it was bad. And, yes, I did those things because of Belos, some because I believed they were right...which sounds so messed up now that I say that...like how can threatening someone be *good* ...and others because I was afraid...but it doesn't matter, the reason, I hurt you and all I can say is I'm truly sorry. And I'll try to do better."

King nodded, "You are. Doing better. I do like you, you know," he said, and Hunter was surprised. King looked as awkward as Hunter felt, twiddling his thumbs (claws?) himself as he admitted it, "I know I haven't done the best job of showing it, but I do. I just...didn't want to start liking you too much in case...you know."

"In case I betrayed you," Hunter nodded, trying hard to hide how much the idea hurt. Both the idea that he actually thought of doing it, not for real but in one of those *what-if* scenarios. And the idea that people still thought he might betray them.

"I know you won't," King placed his paw on Hunter's knee, "It's just my brain being stupid. And maybe...I just needed to say you say that you're sorry? Is that dumb?"

Hunter thought back to his talk with Darius, how he also needed to hear certain things from the coven head to truly start over, "No, I don't think that's dumb. Nor is your brain being stupid. It's ok to be...cautious. I would probably be in your place too."

King nodded, then looked away, brushing his claws through his tail nervously again, "Also...umm...well, you were...ugh, I don't want to sound like a jerk who assumes things, but there is another thing..."

"Just say it, it's ok," Hunter said. He once assumed wild witches, like Eda, were randomly attacking people, unprovoked. What could be a worse assumption than that?

"Well, you were, you know, in EC," King reluctantly looked at Hunter. He nodded, even as King's statement stirred up a whirlpool of emotions in his brain, "Like Lilith. And you believed a bunch of the, you know, *Will of the Titan* junk and similar stuff and now I'm the Titan. I mean, I always was, but now we know. And...well, Lilith was all weird about it," He sighed and Hunter now knew where King was going with this.

"I only met you recently and you acted normal? I mean, we were ene- I mean on opposite sides before but since you're with us you treated me the same as Luz and others. I didn't want to...you know...be treated differently just because I'm a Titan and stuff. Lilith being weird and...bow-y... was bad enough," King pondered something for a moment, "Please tell me you're not just saying sorry because you're scared I might eat you or something? Because, if that is the reason, it's stupid and kinda insulting and I might actually try to eat you!"

Hunter was aghast. Is that how he was coming off? "Oh, oh! No, no, don't worry!" he raised his hands in defence, "I...fine, I was a bit shocked but that's not why I apologized. I'm not scared of you. You're not a threat! I mean, I know you can hold your own in a fight but, you know...ugh, I'm messing it up!" he dragged his hand down his face

King chuckled softly, "Don't worry, I'm not offended."

Hunter looked at him and smiled softly, "It just...occurred to me that I didn't say sorry, so I did. It didn't occur to me that you are a titan while I was trying to think of an apology."

King blared at Hunter for a moment and then facepalmed, "Ugh, it was a stupid worry, wasn't it? I'm just a kid to you, right?"

"Luz's younger brother...but yeah," he scratched the back of his neck, "Sorry? I mean, don't take it as an insult! I...it's like... Gus is just a kid, one I care for as a friend, but, you know..."

King nodded and hugged him briefly, wrapping his hands around Hunter's middle. Hunter returned the hug, mindful not to stab himself on King's horns and passed his hand through King's fur. It was surprisingly soft. What the hell did he do to earn a hug?

"Good. That is good. I..." King sighed, as he let him go, "I just...I don't want people to be scared of me. I mean maybe, you know, to think of me as a worthy ally if we're friends, or as a worthy adversary if we're enemies. But not like, *scared* -scared. Not *I'm scared to talk to him* or *I'm only apologizing to him because he is a titan* scared.

"Don't worry, I'm more scared of saying something stupid or hurtful than anything," Hunter shrugged.

"You're fine," King shrugged, "As long as you don't treat me like I'm a god or something. I just... I just want to be a kid again," he sighed and curled up on himself, "You know, like before. When it was just Eda and me and then Eda, Luz and me." He sighed, "Which is ironic now, because, as a kid, I mean younger kid, I wanted it. You know. I liked to believe I was this scary demon King."

"That's silly, demons were never united-"

"Under a single ruler," King rolled his eyes, "I know, Ugh, you sound like Lilith! Can I continue?"

"Sorry, I interrupted."

"Besides, I'm a kid, do you think I read long history textbooks to know that about demons?"

"Ok, ok, I'm sorry! Where did you even get that idea?"

King looked away for a second, a shade of sadness passing through his eyes, "Long story. But, it's whatever! Back then I wanted people to be afraid. I thought it would be cool and all. If people listened to my every command and stuff. Now...I learned I am a Titan. I could probably have that, if Lilith's reaction was anything to go by. And now that I know that I don't want people to listen to me just because they are scared. And titans are scary and...ugh now I don't want to be scary! Not like that!" King clutched his paws, and shut his eyes, as if he wanted to chase away a truth he didn't want to accept, "Sometimes...I wish I never found out the truth. I really wanted to know who I was and now...maybe it was better when I didn't know."

Hunter looked at the kid that was pouring his soul out to him. Why? He didn't fully understand what he did to earn King's trust so suddenly that King was opening up to him like this.

He could relate, though. Nobody knew anything about titans. The titan they lived on was respected, revered and prayed to. But, as a species, if they were ever talked about, they were spoken of as a myth. A scary one. It was the same with Grimwalkers. Grimwalkers were supposed to be scary, and he hoped he wasn't.

He didn't want to be a thing of nightmares.

"I don't think you're scary," he said to King, "Not inherently. And, who knows, maybe people got the titans all wrong."

"Huh?"

"Look, my entire worldview got shattered, like, less than two weeks ago. And sometimes I want to go back. I mean, I know it was bad, but things made sense. Now they don't and I'm questioning everything. I was taught to believe wild magic was scary. Now I'm using it. I'm reading books about it. My best friend is made of it," he scratched the bird on his shoulder, "I was taught that wild witches are evil and then Eda took me in even if I hurt you all before. Maybe...maybe witches got titans all wrong too."

King looked at him, a hint of a smile on his face, but still conflicted, "Maybe. But what if titans *are* scary? I don't want that. I mean sure, I want to be fierce enough to scare away someone if they try to attack me, or my family or friends, you know, how Eda is scary, but she isn't, really. But I really don't want to be a ruler of any kind, let alone a scary, despotic, kind. It sounds like Being a tyrant... I'd be like Belos," Hunter flinched slightly at the name and King leaned into his side at that, "And je hurt everyone I love. And everyone those who I love, love. Luz', And Eda, and Lilith, and you and...me...and he wants to hurt everyone on the Isles! I don't want to be like him."

"Me neither," Hunter chuckled bitterly, "which...it's funny, I Always wanted to be like him, you know. I...Like Being respected. I still like *that*. But now I know how much of it was fear. I mean I knew it before. I even enjoyed it. I don't have to tell you that, probably," he spat, resentfully, "But I thought it was for the greater good. That it was necessary...I don't want that anymore."

King placed a paw to his knee again, "I'm sorry that that...ugh, I think all the words that can describe him are *adult words* I'm not supposed to say. Even those probably don't do justice to how awful Belos is. Huh, maybe titan language has some...anyways, I'm sorry you only had him. At least I had Eda, and Hooty and then Luz our friend and even Lilith...you didn't. No wonder you believed all those wrong things."

Hunter scoffed, "I don't need your pity!"

Flapjack chirped warningly, and King looked at him, letting out a small huff, more annoyed than anything and Hunter winced, "Sorry. I'm being mean I just..." he trailed off and felt Flapjack nuzzling against his neck in comfort.

"No, it's ok, I get it," King climbed up to Hunter's lap and curled up there.

It took Hunter off guard. He saw King do that before, with Eda, Luz, Lilith, even Raine. But never with Hunter. King crossed his arms and laid his head on top of them, "I find people being kind to me out of pity annoying as well. But I found compassion is quite cool," King muttered and something warm filled Hunter's chest.

"Yeah...sounds nice..." he smiled. No, no, his eyes were *not* welling up with tears again. Flapjack lightly pecked his ear in that *don't act tough* way he sometimes would. "Maybe even if titans and gri-I mean, former Belos followers are scary...maybe we can choose not to be?"

"Scratches..." King muttered.

Hunter hesitated for a moment before started scratching his back, gently, combing his fingers through King's fur. He never did something like that with anyone other than Flapjack. The bird

flew down from his shoulder and to his knee, curling up next to King.

“My head, spot between my horns,” King demanded, and Hunter listened, moving his hand.

“There?”

“Mhm...” King relaxed.

Hunter frowned, a bit confused, “You feel it? I mean...it’s your skull?”

“I don’t know how it works; I just know I like it!” King argued, “Hey, what happened to your hands?”

Hunter stopped what he was doing, and looked at them, a bit self-conscious. He was getting more and more comfortable around people without his gloves; however, he wasn’t certain if King ever saw his scars up close.

“Oh, it’s fine,” Hunter flexed and unflexed his hand to prove it, “Just...old injuries from missions.”

“Sheesh, those must’ve been some nasty missions,” King said compassionately, “But I meant this,” he pointed to a scratch on Hunter’s palm, “You’re bleeding.”

“Umm...while wrapping Luz’s jacket, I may have created a thorny vine first...and pricked myself,” Hunter reached for tissues next to Luz’s bed, trying to hide how flustered he was about a silly mistake like that, “It probably re-opened just now. Don’t worry, I won’t bleed all over you.”

“Give me a moment,” King said and jumped off Hunter’s lap, rushed to one of the bags piled in the corner and got a small box from there, “Here,” he put a band-aid on Hunter’s palm. It had flowers on it, just like the ones he saw Luz and King use for the last few days, “It may sound silly, but now, you’re part of boo-boo buddies club!”

“What?” Hunter wondered, it sounded so childish. (Even if, he had to admit, whatever it was, he felt like he should be honoured to belong to some kind of a club they had).

“Just go with it!”

“Ok,” Hunter smiled and scratched King’s back, “Thanks.”

“Hey, by the way,” Hunter asked just as King was about to nod off and the young titan jerked and gave him a slightly disgruntled glare.

“Letme sleep!”

“Sorry,” Hunter said, “It can wait for the morning.”

“Nah, you already woke me up now,” King poked him in the side, “ask. Besides, we’re leaving in the morning. We won’t have time then.”

“Titan, make up your mind,” Hunter chuckled, then stopped, and reconsidered his words. “Wait, do you mind that use of the word?”

“Eh, I think I’ll have to get used to it, I mean, people have been using it for thousands of years and I’ve known I’m a titan for a few days, What should I expect? I am warning you that I will sometimes joke about it,” King snickered, “Now, what did you want to ask?”

“You’re the author of Ruler’s reach, right?”

“Yup! I wondered when you were going to figure it out. I saw your Penstagram handle. Traumatic memory, publishing of that book,” King said, “However, I’m always glad to meet a fan. Even if you’re all nerds!”

“Hey! You wrote it, that makes you the biggest nerd!”

“Hmph,” King pouted, “I don’t like your logic.”

“Like it or not, it’s true,” Hunter teased. King smacked his hand, “Now I get why Eda says she is always surrounded by nerds.”

“And you’re one of those nerds!”

“Fine, I’m a nerd!” Hunter threw his hands out in defeat, “Will you sign this nerd’s book?”

“Yup,” King said, then added, a bit awkwardly, “but...you should also probably ask Luz for an autograph...”

“What?”

“Ok, don’t speak about this publicly too much,” King said awkwardly, “But...she helped with the writing process *a lot* . Actually, we wrote the book together but I...stole the glory. Then I almost got us turned into a tiny cube by an evil publisher, but we managed to escape!”

“What?”

“Told you it was a traumatising experience!”

“I thought you meant *publishing paperwork and editing is difficult* , not *I was almost murdered!*” Hunter cried. He got the feeling that *almost dying* wasn’t a normal part of a childhood.

“Oh, we wouldn’t be murdered. Just forced to serve a crazy publisher for all eternity!”

“Wow...”

“Point being,” King sighed, “Luz should sign the book too. But we can do that before we get to sleep. Because I’m not leaving now. Now, scratches!”

“Ok, ok,” Hunter pet his head, “I’m on it. Get in here,” he scooted closer to the wall, and placed King on his lap. “Can I read?”

“Yeah, do whatever. I’ll nap anyway.”

The two stayed like that for a while, King’s breathing eventually calmed down and even Hunter eventually started nodding off. He tried to stay up for a while, but after he almost fell asleep for the third time, he gave up, allowing the hand he held the book in to fall limply next to him.

He wasn’t in deep slumber, but it was still nice.

“Awww,” he heard Luz coo after a while. “you two are getting along! Finally!”

“Sh’t ‘p,” Hunter muttered.

He felt the mattress shift as she landed next to him, “You two are so *adorable!*”

“Quiet, you, human!” Hunter opened his eyes and half-heartedly glared at her.

“Oh yeah, you are so threatening like that!” looked at him teasingly, scratching King as well, “I’m shivering in fear!”

“Mph...” Hunter grunted.

“Act grumpy all you want,” she leaned heavily on him, “I saw that small, *I’m relaxed and enjoying this smile!*”

“Yeah, yeah,” he rolled his eyes, elbowing her lightly.

“I’ll move if I’m a bother,” she said.

“No, It’s fine. I’m just...not used to this. You know, cuddling and stuff.”

Was it his imagination, or did King curl up closer to him?

Luz looked at him with *that* look, hey eyebrows slightly raised, close together. She threw her arms around him for a brief hug.

“See?” King muttered from his lap, “She’ll get you used to it. Oh, also, Luz, to your left. Hunter left it for you.”

“What? Wait, a present!?”

Hunter let out a strangled sound as she ripped into it.

“My...ohmtitan! Darius fixed it?” she looked at him, a delighted grin on her face.

“No, um...”

“Hunter fixed it,” King cleared up.

“Yeah, sorry I lied to you before. I knew where it was,” Hunter scratched his neck, not looking directly at Luz as she studied his stitching, feeling a bit uncomfortable. “Do you like it? I mean, it’s a bit messy and you can probably ask Darius to fix it if it’s too bad...”

She turned to him, with a ridiculously wide smile “*I love it!* The elbow patches are cool!”

“Darius’ idea,” Hunter shrugged, “And he helped me,”

“Oh right,” She chuckled, “Your *sewing lesson* !” she air quoted.”

“Sorry I hid it from you the whole day.”

“Never mind that! You fixed it! I thought it was ruined! Thank you!!!” she pulled him into a tight hug. One of those rib-cracking hugs that seemed to be her speciality.

“Yeah...no...problem,” he patted her on the back.

She let go, and put the jacket on before she leaned on him. For a moment, he wanted to shove her away, but he thought better of it and relaxed. Luz starts scratching King, and, after a moment of hesitation, Hunter threw his arm around her.

She let out a sound that he assumed was a restrained squeal of joy, and beamed at him before she leaned her head on his shoulder and closed her eyes. It felt nice, and comforting. He relaxed and drifted off into sleep.



They all needed it before the next day. And after that, it would all be over. And, if he was lucky, evenings like this would become something Hunter was used to.

....

Two hours later, Eda was combing the house, "Where are those three? We need to get over the plan one more time and have dinner!"

She entered their room and found quite a sight. All three were huddled together, King and Flapjack curled up on Hunter's lap. Luz was leaning on Hunter's shoulder, curled up next to him, his arm over her shoulder.

Eda smiled warmly, "Eh, I guess you can sleep," she took blankets from her and Hunter's beds and threw one over the boy and the other over her kid, so all three were properly covered.

"Eda, did you-oh," Darius peaked into the room.

"Shh, goo-boy, you'll wake the babies," she pointed to the kids, "And then Blondie's bird will pluck your eyes out and we can only rely on Steve's healing abilities and some potions. Come on, we'll leave them some dinner and tell them the plans once they wake up."

"Their mission should be safe, your kid goes save her girlfriend, from that hack Alador and Odalia, and my k-I mean Hunter--"

"Ah, heard you!" she elbowed him as they were leaving the room.

He huffed, "Shut up!"

"Eh, the faster you decide to admit it, the easier it will be! Speaking from experience here."

"Ugh..." he rolled his eyes, ignoring her, "as I was saying, Luz goes to rescue Amity Blight, Hunter tags for protection..."

"My kid doesn't need protection!" she argued.

"I know. Hunter does. Maybe not in a fight but...from Belos. He needs people in his life."

"Yeah, they all do. Therefore, romantic rescue mission. Now, let's go save them some food before my Hooty gobbles it all up."

The two walked over to the kitchen. Tomorrow, they had a fight to plan. But today, she looked around and saw the kids. Her three kids. It was strange to think she had three kids now. Even if she had to share one with a human and another with Darius (no matter how much he tried to deny it).

Tonight, those three could still rest. And after tomorrow, they would build a better life for them.

.....

As Darius and Eda left the room, Hunter smiled.

"Should we go have dinner?" Luz muttered into his shoulder.

King let a sound that was quite obviously meant to be a no.

"I'm fine here for a while," Hunter said. Hearing Darius slip made him emotional and if he was in the same room with the man, he would probably straight up start sobbing.

“Hmm,” Luz shifted slightly next to him, fixing the blanket, “You love us! Admit it!”

*Tell them, tell them!* Flapjack insisted.

“You’re not that bad,” He managed.

“Awww!”

“Now shut up! I’m sleeping!”

King poked him in the side.

“Hey!”

“Scratches!” the kid demanded.

“I’m resting!”

“You can do that while you rest!”

Hunter rolled his eyes but did as asked, and King practically purred.

“Things will be all right,” Luz mumbled, as she drifted off to sleep, “I just know they will.”

And, even as he knew the next day held what would probably be the hardest day of their lives, as he laid next to his ~~siblings~~ friends and palisman, Hunter, for the first time since leaving Belos had a feeling she was right. He cleared the air with everyone and made amends, and they had a pretty solid plan.

There was no reason to believe otherwise.

## Chapter End Notes

And then Clouds on The Horizon happens and...yeah...

But at least they are hopeful for now.

Anyways, I know this one is a bit shorter but I felt like I put in everything I wanted here.

----

That’s the end, the plus one. I had fun with this one and, while I’m proud I finished a fic, I’m also sad it came to an end. Thanks to everyone who was reading, for all the kudos and comments, bookmarks and subscriptions they really warm my heart. And thanks for staying with this even with my erratic posting schedule.

Anyways, that’s all for this fic, folks, if you’d like, stay tuned for the next stuff I post, if not, thanks for staying with this fic and BYEEEE!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!

